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Low Level Adventuring

Summer
2012
Issue 1

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Old tournament method of character generation that is **useful**

Learning & Discovery

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85 Points for the Mathematically Challenged

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And-Mag.com

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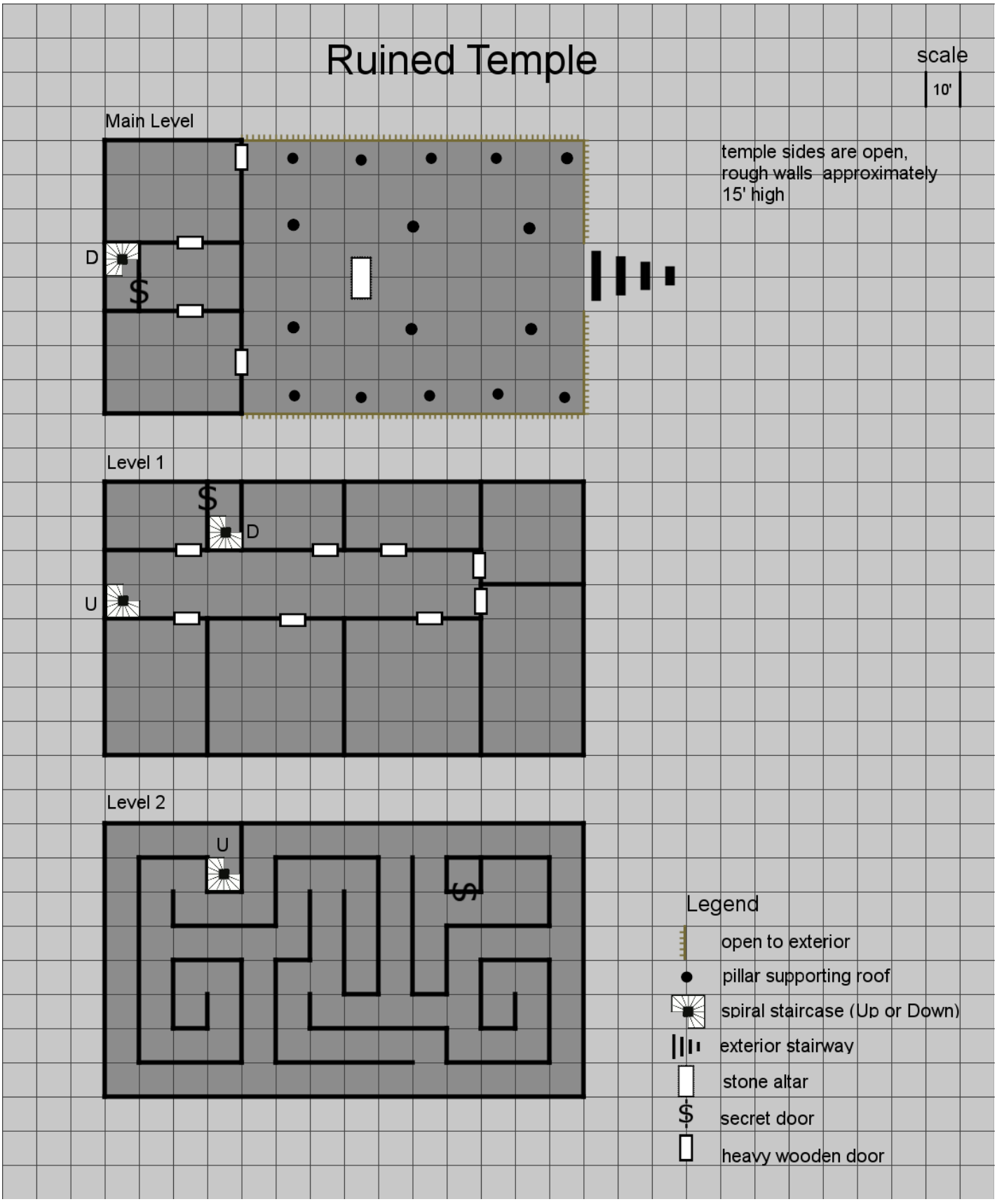

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Tread Softly

by Nicole Massey

Thoughts from the chief editor

Welcome to the first issue of **&**. We hope to provide you with a lot of ideas and perspectives, along with some entertainment and some thought provoking debates.

Why do we call it **&**? Since there has already been a *Dungeon Magazine* and a *Dragon Magazine*, they didn't leave us much. But it also fits our philosophy – we're looking to fill in the gaps in the original books and present other viewpoints and angles, both of which reflect the nature of the "&" as a character and concept.

We're going to also publish some things we may not agree with in terms of the game. A game with as long a history as the versions of Dungeons & Dragons we support will have a lot of strong opinions about what works and doesn't work in the game, and some folks might benefit from a viewpoint that differs from mine or that of the rest of the staff.

What is my viewpoint of the game? I play AD&D first edition, and have never made a switchover to any other version after getting my Player's Handbook. I have played sessions in second and third editions, but none in fourth. I believe it's the best edition of the game, and I fully support abstract combat when playing it, so you won't find me using hit locations, called shots, feints, or location specific critical hits. (You also won't find me using the weaponless combat from the Dungeon Master's Guide, either) If I want more realistic combat I'll use another rules set, (my fantasy game world is worked out in three different systems that each bring different things to the experience, and I'm considering adding a fourth) so you won't get things corrupted from other versions of the game from me – when it comes to AD&D, I'm about as pure as you can get in that regard, so I won't talk about kits, prestige classes, attacks of opportunity, feats, or encounter powers. (I know of these things mostly from the angry rants of other players) My conception of the game is all enhancements from what was laid down by Gary Gygax.

I have my own radical viewpoints – I don't buy the concept of NPC classes, I don't use level limits for demi-human characters (both of these make sense from a game mechanics point of view but not from a societal point of view), I don't allow two classes in my game – Assassins and Barbarians, for different reasons, and I have a lot of house rules. Seriously. My own critical hit system that keeps the abstract flavor of the game, a parry system that likewise keeps everything abstract, more character classes than most people could handle, new races, a lot of new spells … you get the idea. I use Unearthed Arcana, with some specific changes. I use select things from the Dungeoneer's Survival Guide and Wilderness Survival Guide, but not all of it, because that's just too much to keep going for most sessions. I think you get the idea.

My background? I've been gaming for 33 years, starting out with the boxed set and making the jump to AD&D soon after. I've also played Top Secret, Star Trek RPG, Rolemaster/Spacemaster, GURPS, Gamma World, Mage: The Ascension, Adventure!, and a couple of text based online games. I'm a published author, and I have both fiction and articles in all three of the Gamma World fanzine called Project Stone Jambalaya. (I'll also be in the fourth issue when it comes out) I'm a musician with a degree in it. I have a background in travel, IT, and Technical writing. I've participated in the creation of 5 different role-playing games. So I tend to have a lot of background in games and gaming. I'm also a very creative person who loves to see things come together.

Though we have some great volunteers making this work, we need your help too or this is going to die like so many others. What can you do? Give us your creations – no, not your firstborn

child, but your monsters, magic items, spells, shops and houses, and opinions, as a start. We're going to print a letters column, so write us if you like what we're doing or if you don't. We also need rules questions so we can populate our rules clarifications column. And if you have an article you'd like to see published, of course we want to look at it. We can also use proofers, advisors who have a strong background in the supported systems, and people to talk us up to their gaming friends. This isn't just our magazine, it's yours too, and we want you folks involved.

Oh, and if you're one of those folks who prefers a hardcopy of the magazine instead of a PDF, you'll be pleased to know that we are investigating printing options. While you can print it yourself, if you are one of those folks who wants a "real" magazine, email us at letters@and-mag.com and let us know you are interested in "real" magazines. And if you'd like to see us on book reader formats like Nook and Kindle, we would also appreciate that information as well.

One last thing – we do accept donations to support the magazine, so if you have a couple of bucks you'd like to send our way, we'd be happy to get them. Please navigate to http://www.and-mag.com/donate.html and we'll put them to good use.

But enough of that, what about this issue? We felt it appropriate to start a new magazine with a theme of starting campaigns. We've got some exciting things in store. For those tired of adventures starting with taverns or nobility calling for volunteers, Andrew Hamilton's article will give you a lot of things to think about. I have an article on a fast way of generating characters I've been using for a long time that also provides balanced characters for each party member, eliminating the eternal whine about unfair dice. And I also put together an article about pre-generated equipment packs for players who just want to get their character created and get to the action. Our feature articles from Vince Lethal and Bryan Fazekas look at survivability from both sides of the DM screen. Ben Lomax has some tasty fiction for us set in a … you guessed it, tavern.

The staff and authors of **&** are all in our 40's, long time players of AD&D. All except one -- this issue's cover art is created by Caleb Horowitz, a teenage fan of AD&D!

I've already mentioned my entry for our Toy Box column, the equipment packs. But we also have some new spells (first level, of course), some adventure seeds, and a one page dungeon. And while reading this issue in your favorite dungeon, watch out for those Carrion Crabs, which are outlined in our creature column. Also check out the generic maps inside the covers, and don't miss our further reading column, where we suggest some other places where you can look for more information in other published sources.

So welcome to the first issue of **&** -- Filling in the Gaps for Old School Gamers.

Editor's Note: Scattered through each issue of **&** are quotes from real D&D players. These quotes were spotted by the **&** editors in D&D forums they frequent, and are reprinted with each author's permission.

Fresnel's Lantern

by Ralph Glatt

This small lantern looks like a 8" cubic box with a wire handle. On the bottom is a bracket which will fit over a 1" thick pole so that the lantern may be mounted.

Each of the four sides has a hinged cover that fills most of the side. Each cover is held in place by a small latch. When a cover is opened light shines forth, strongly resembling **Continual Light** as per the spell.

Each of the four covers may be opened or closed independently at the choice of the bearer, so that light may shine in up to four directions.

Note that a successful Dispel Magic vs. 11th level magic will cause the light to extinguish for 1 round per level/HD of the caster.

Tactical Studies Review for Novices

by Vince Lethal

Author's Note: Many AD&D gamers won't need this article. This is intended for the new players, those who might not have played OSR RPGs before, and don't understand the lethality of this style of play. If you have a new player who doesn't know the ropes quite yet, have them read this.

This article may be of use to the veteran players whose usual player character (PC) got killed, and has forgotten how hard it is keeping new characters alive.

Low Ability Scores

You may create your PC with a vision of who he is already. Or you may let fate decide and you interpret the dice to find what you get. Either way, you should not let bad rolls get in your way. Say you roll all 3's for abilities and a 1 for hit points. Your PC is one bad sneeze away from the grave. If this is not the hero you envisioned or you can't read a way from the bones to make these scores work – just start over. You should not be shackled to those results.

Rather than roll thousands of times, some people use an ability sum number. It saves time, and you may help if you have in mind what you want your PC to be. *Editor's note: see Balanced Character Generation by Nicole Massey in this issue for an example of this type of system.*

Pooling Resources

We've all been there; working like an accountant under audit trying to figure out how to get the most equipment out of our starting money. Most people approach this with an eye toward their character as if he was alone. Understandable, as we want our PCs to be prepared for any situation and we have no way of knowing what another player and their PC will bring to the table. Or even what PC a player might use for that night's session.

An ancient Commodore 64 game called "The Bard's Tale" got me to think otherwise. It had a feature for the members of the party to pool their gold to pay for something that singly they could not afford, such as raising dead PCs. Such a thing might be standard today but it was thinking outside the box back then, when every adventurer was out for himself. It may seem too simple to be worth considering for veteran gamers. It is worth considering for novices though.

For example, take a run of the mill pair of adventurers, a fighter magic user, both starting out with no equipment and whatever starting money they rolled up. Anyone with a grasp of game mechanics know that Fighters need the best armor they can get to be of optimum use to the group. The best a 1st level fighter could hope to buy with 5d4x10gp is banded mail armor, and that takes most of his starting money (if he had that much). Not much left over. Plate mail is still a far off dream.

Now the fighter's partner is a magic user with 2d4x10 GP to start. Personally, I don't see much that a magic user *has* to buy at 1st level. Their weapons are not expensive. They have no armor to buy. A lot of their material components can be scavenged for free. The magic-user should give serious thought to giving his fighter friend a loan to make sure he gets the best armor and weapons he can. That way the fighter can stand in between the magic-user and whatever they run into down in the dungeon for a longer period of time.

This goes for all classes. Whether it is a bag of thieves' tools or special equipment for the cleric or magic-user. Or maybe one character can't afford to buy rations. Pooling resources makes for a better prepared party. It also encourages cooperation within the group as the PCs who loaned the money want to make sure the PC they lent it to survives long enough to pay them back. Charging interest is optional.

Even if you have enough GP to get what you want, you don't need to spend every last cp

you have. The fighter above doesn't need to buy one of every weapon he is proficient with. He could buy a weapon he prefers using and a spare, that's 2. Likewise, though it would be a good idea, every character in the group doesn't need a lantern, oil, and a tinder box. Even if they did, you wouldn't need every lantern burning at the same time.

If the PCs can discuss it before festivities commence, they can decide who brings what to the picnic to avoid everyone showing up with 250' of rope with no grappling hooks, no lanterns, and no torches. One PC can buy rope and a grappling hook, someone else can buy a lantern or two, etc.

Equipment

Carrying Spares

For melee weapons, it doesn't hurt to carry an extra sword in case yours breaks. Or you drop it while running scared. Or it get destroyed by / stuck in a monster. If you get a magic weapon you want to hold onto, look into getting a loop of leather woven around the handle that can be cinched to your wrist. I wouldn't think it would cost more than a sling.

I've known players whose magic-users bought one dagger and went traipsing confidently into the dungeon. Or if they had enough they bought a silver dagger for the prestige and to fight of werewolves if they ran into them. In the first fight the group gets into, they throw their only dagger and do 1 hit point of damage. Then they stand around for the rest of the melee watching because the party wants to save his spell for something really bad.

I have the view that you don't carry just 4 darts ... or just 12 arrows. As in real life, you just don't know how many rabid animals you're going to run into. So you take as much ammo as you can carry. How does this jibe with what I was just saying above, about not spending everything? Above, I meant that if your fighter knows how to use 4 weapons - he doesn't need to carry an example of each one. Or keep buying weapons until he runs out of money.

Here I mean that you should plan on combats that last longer than 1 round. It would be safe to assume that a party will see at least 10 rounds of combat in a dungeon foray. So PCs that use missile weapons should buy enough ammunition to last 10 rounds. If the ammo breaks when it is fired, bring even more. I feel comfortable when my PC has three quivers that each hold 20 arrows; one on his back, carrying 2 by the strap in his left hand and a bow in his right.

Ranged and Melee Combat

This brings me to another topic, the right tool for the right situation. At its most basic, you want a weapon for close fighting and a weapon for ranged combat. You may have to fight someone on the other side of a ditch or stream. Ranged combat is the low level character's best friend.

I met a guy once in a tournament who assigned most of his points to his thief's charisma and comeliness. He had it in mind to be a con man who talked people into giving him their money. Wouldn't you know the scenario led our group outside the city? And what should we run into but a pack of wolves? The con man had exactly one (1) dagger on him. He couldn't throw it, as he would be unarmed against a pack of wolves. He wasn't anxious to wade into hand to fang combat with them either - being a first level thief with leather armor and 6 hit points separating him and the afterlife. Luckily for everyone I was carrying a Color Spray spell.

If you have a melee and a missile weapon, you might think about other situations. A lot of beginners think about skeletons and how blunt weapons are the only thing that does full damage. That's a valid point. But it's one monster - with 1-8 hit points - and AC 7. You could get by carrying a blunt weapon and not even be proficient in it. The same goes for Rust Monsters. You could carry a club or staff, a wooden shield, and a suit of leather armor just in case you ran into one. But how often is that? It wouldn't hurt to carry a quiver of silver arrows, or a pouch of silver sling bullets as there are more creatures vulnerable to silver, making these items more useful. Another thing worth

considering is to buy torches stout enough to function as clubs.

Weapon Frequency

Also titled: Or how often will I find a weapon I am proficient with?

This is something worth thinking about during weapon proficiency selection. You find long swords in treasure piles often, much more often than falchions or khopesh swords. Flails do more damage than maces, so some clerics pick them. Or some pick hammers because you can throw them. Enchanted maces are common - enchanted flails or hammers not so much. Choosing a generic weapon is a safe bet, much safer than being a master of the bohemian ear spoon.

Some players try and get around this by leaving their weapon proficiency slots empty. Then when they get a hold of a magic weapon, they'll use one of their slots to train on how to use their new weapon. I've never seen a rule in 1e AD&D that said you MUST fill all your slots.

Carrying Containers

I don't have much to say on this subject, other than this. It is better to have 5 wineskins that can hold 1 gallon of liquid rather than 1 wineskin that can hold 5 gallons of liquid. Should a stray arrow hit your wineskin, one hole can leak out 1 gallon of your wine or leak out 5 gallons.

When you think about it, PCs should carry potion bottles in a wineskin in case they break. Not the same one because you don't want them all breaking in the same container and mixing into nitroglycerin. Metal canteens or flasks are another option. No iron flasks though.

Carry a backpack and 2 sacks. Carry your important equipment in your backpack, carry expendable things like food and extra arrows in the bags, one for each hand. If you find treasure, you can dump the food and arrows for the loot. If you have to run for it and need to drop the sacks, your important equipment is still in your backpack.

Do not leave anything magic in a saddle bag or on a pack animal. Mounts are easily panicked and run away with your stuff (or carried off by dragons).

Ideas for the Classes

Fighters, Paladins, Rangers

Starting money: 5d4 x10gp
Armor: any
Weapons Fighter 4, Paladin and Ranger 3

Without fighting men in your group, adventures will be nasty, brutal, and short. No other class is as good at combat at 1st level (except guard dogs). I don't wish to repeat what others have said before about these classes. I do want to point out some things that may not be readily apparent to new players.

Consider the abstract objective of the adventuring party. The goal is to go as far(or deep) into the dungeon as the group can. The deep down theoretically being where the better loot is, which is guarded by tougher monsters. If there is a specific objective (rescue the damsel in distress / recover an object / slay a particular monster) then the group is trying to get to that one goal with as much ammunition, equipment, and spells and in as good of shape as it can. Every obstacle and encounter in between is designed to wear the party down or make them turn back.

Which is where the Fighters come in. Of any class, they are the most likely to be able to handle a dungeon on their own. Given enough time and cannon fodder, there aren't many obstacles Fighters can't hack through or break down. To keep from making new Fighter PCs all the time as well as speed things up, the game has specialist classes (cleric, magic-user, and thief) and their sub-classes to assist the fighting men. Or if you are playing a specialist, the fighting men assist you.

When the group runs into monsters, the Fighters job is to kill them, as well as to keep them from killing the spell casters (liken this to the front line in football keeping the opposing team from sacking their quarterback). The group could let

the warriors handle every encounter, but you want to keep them in good enough shape to keep fighting until you reach your overall goal. And they have to handle any fight when the group reaches that goal.

In other words, the Fighters are there to handle the low and medium level obstacles. For the higher level encounters, the fighter's job switches from destroying the enemy to keeping that enemy at arm's length until the heavy artillery (magic-users or clerics) can use magic to tip the scales in the party's favor. Thieves can do the same with a well timed backstab.

So you have clerics and magic-users cast some of their minor spells to finish fights quicker or repair some of the damage the Fighters have taken. And the party can go further into the dungeon than if the individual members went in alone. The whole is greater than the sum.

Remember though, at low level your Fighters are still just one or two hits away from death's door. Be like a light warhorse, fast and agile enough to outrun your foes. Because you don't have the bulk to be a heavy warhorse and slug it out with them yet.

Starting out, you want the best armor you and your friends can buy. And they should contribute - as you are all that will be standing between them and any biting beast the group encounters. As for weapons, you only need to get what you know how to use. You have 4 or 3 weapons you are proficient with. If you are trained with a sword it makes no sense to get a flail.

I pause to mention the barbarian and cavalier. With the right rolls, surviving past 1st level won't be hard for either of these classes. And most of what I said above will work for any Fighter sub-class.

Clerics and Druids

Starting money: 3d6 x10gp (Monks 5d4)
Armor: Clerics any, Druids leather, Monks none
Weapons Cleric 2, Druid 2, Monk 1

Clerics have the best armor choices. Their weapon selection is not great, mostly blunt ones. It is a mistake to think that because they get good armor, they should be on the front lines. Front line fighting is not the main function of a Cleric. Their main role is to support the party and allow it to travel further into the dungeon than it would otherwise be able to go. Their armor is a perk that keeps them from getting killed off easily. Keep in mind the support function of Clerics if you play one. You could choose all offensive spells and jump into melee with the Fighters. But if are playing a Cleric pretending to be a Fighter - who will pretend to be the Cleric? None of the other main classes have access to healing spells like you do.

Just as Clerics should not pretend to be Fighters, Druids should not try to be Clerics. By this I mean that Druids are different enough from Clerics that they warrant a whole new outlook when being played. They have a wider variety of weapons than standard Clerics. Their to hit ability remains the same as standard Clerics - they are not better at dealing damage, they just have more tools to do it with. Any advantage that would give them is hampered by their restriction to leather armor. The gods giveth and they taketh away.

The spell choice is supposed to be different to. Since the starting spells for a Druid are not as pragmatic as a Cleric, Druids get 2 spells at level 1. They have to wait until level 2 to get 2nd level spells that heal. Don't count on the 1st level Druid for healing - it's just not something he can do.

What a druid can do is wrangle animals via the **Animal Friendship** and **Speak with Animals** spells. Sigh ... yes, like Aquaman. I wanted to be sure and mention this to new players as this sometimes gets overlooked when you consider all the other nifty and more flashy offensive spells a cleric or magic-user can cast. But consider this - the Animal Friendship allows the 1st level Druid to have 2 hit dice of friendly animals following him. Among the animals available in the Players Handbook that fall within the category of 2HD and under are dogs, goats, hawks, light warhorses, and riding horses. Housecats are free - people throw them out into the streets all the time.

Another thing that some people overlook is that a 2HD Guard Dog (25gp) has about the same

chance to hit opponents as a level 5 fighter. A small hawk is almost as good as a level one Fighter while a large hawk is about the equal of a 2nd level Fighter, with regards to chance of hitting. With proper training, such animals are better fighters than the 1st level Druid. He could have the guard dog with 1 attack per round or 2 hawks that each attack 3 times per round.

While domestic cats might be the equivalent of a 1st level thief or magic-user in combat, even druids haven't found a way to compel them to fight for someone besides themselves.

Monks are complicated. They only get 1 weapon of proficiency at 1st level, so they better make it count. Some people may go right for the pole arms, specifically the halberd. It does a lot of damage, sure. Do you really want your guy who can't wear any armor to get that close to melee? Or you could pick a missile weapon and rely on what open hand attacks you can make if an enemy gets to close. It would be wise to pick one of the weapons they can melee with or throw - clubs, daggers, hand axes, or spears. If they live long enough, they can gain more proficient weapons faster than most classes.

Monks aren't allowed to use any Strength bonuses they might have for melee. And Dexterity gives them no bonus to their Armor Class. I don't believe either restriction applies to helping them aim missile weapons. With the damage bonus they get when using weapons (which I take to mean both melee and missile), it would make sense for low level monks to stay in back with the other missile combatants. Of course, if they use a spear, they can also attack from the second rank, letting the Fighter soak up the front line damage.

Magic Users and Illusionists

Starting money: 2d4 x10gp
Armor: none
Weapons 1

Magic-user's only get 1 proficient weapon at the start, and have to wait until 7th level to get the next one. Players should choose wisely. Personally, I would never choose the staff as my main weapon from 1st to 7th level. True it does the most damage for any magic-user weapon (a whopping 1d6). However, the chief drawback is that your Magic-user must be standing next to a monster that hits back. Also, the magic-user will only get 1 attack per round.

I would much rather pick a missile weapon for the magic-user. Savvy players are more likely to assign an above average ability score to Dexterity rather than Strength (hoping to make their magic-user harder to hit, since they can't use any armor). If their Dexterity score is high enough, they benefit from the bonus to hit with missile weapons.

Daggers would be my first choice; they can be used as missiles or in melee. You get 2 attacks per round when thrown which is better than a staff. The range is short, but at least it's outside of melee range.

Darts have a slightly better range than daggers, do a little less damage, but a magic-user gets 3 attacks per round. This is the most attacks an magic-user will get.

Slings have only one shot per round. They make up for this with one of the longest ranges of any missile weapon in the game. You can use bullets for more damage, if thou art frugal, you can use just about any small rock. This gives you an unlimited supply of free ammunition.

Just because you picked one of the above weapons as your weapon of proficiency doesn't stop you from carrying or using any of the other weapons. Say you choose the staff as your weapon of proficiency. You are not limited to only using that weapon. You are 'allowed' to carry and use daggers, darts, and slings. Since you are 'non-proficient' in their use - you will have a -5 penalty on your to hit rolls. You will only want to do this in special circumstances, such as if the targets are easy to hit. If you're up against a rust monster it makes more sense to use a wooden staff. If the target is far away, a sling may be the only weapon with the range to hit it.

Thieves and Assassins

Starting money: 2d6 x10gp
Armor: Padded, leather, studded leather (Assassins can use shields when not using Thief

skills, backstabbing, or an assassination strike) Weapons Thief 2, Assassin 3

With their above average Dexterity scores, Thieves would be well advised to stay off the front lines and use missile weapons instead. Their backstab ability may seem impressive. The reality is that their "to hit" ability is not great, neither is their armor or hit points. If you can surprise an opponent and backstab, great. If you fail to surprise them, you are now in melee, possibly without support.

While Assassins have a much broader range of weapons and can use a shield, this does not make them suitable front line fighters. They have the same "to hit", body armor, and hit point characteristics as Thieves.

There is a major misconception about Assassins & their table in the DMG. I had the good fortune to e-mail Gary Gygax about this and receive an answer. The table showing the percent chances for a successful assassination refers not to an overall job of spying on a target, sneaking into his lair, a successful combat and getting out again. That's not what the table is about. The table is about the chance for assassin to reduce his target to 0 hit points on a successful hit.

The Assassin has to surprise his target just as in the case of a Thief attempting to backstab. If the Assassin can catch his target off guard and successfully hit, he rolls d% on the assassination table to see if his strike knocks the target to 0 hit points. Even if the assassination strike is unsuccessful, he can do backstab damage if he was using a Thief allowed weapon and not using a shield. And if the Assassin is using poison on his weapon - that is all the more salt for the wound.

To my horror, Mr. Gygax said Assassins can try an assassination strike using missile weapons as well (though these are not eligible for backstab damage).

That revelation added a whole new dimension of threat to this class. Not so much for the players who get to run one by the grace of their DM. The thought of my characters being attacked at long range from one or more Assassins hidden in shadows or bushes makes me cringe.

Spell Selection

I won't get too specific with spells. I'd rather give general advice. Your PC can play around with spells when he has more to cast. At first level you have to select what you're going to memorize carefully. Choose a spell that affects many targets over a spell that affects one target. Choose one you can be certain of rather than one that may or may not work.

As I said earlier, Clerics have a specific function in relation to the group that other classes can't do, heal. That should be foremost in your mind when choosing spells. If the party has more than one Cleric, you could carry some non-curative spells. Remember, with Cure Light Wounds you know it will work for 1d8 hit points. You don't have to roll to hit or worry that the target will make his save.

With the combat spells, contrast Bless/Curse with Command and Magic Stone. Bless/Curse affects allies or enemies in a 5" x 5" area, however many are in that area. There is no save. And it lasts 6 rounds. This will have a larger effect than Command which affects 1 target or Magic Stone which gives the Beginning Cleric 1 rock to throw once. Command also has a limited duration, the target gets a save, and must understand what you are saying. The Clerical defense spells are limited at 1st level too. They mostly affect just one person.

Clerics and magic-users can cast similar spells. Example: Detect Magic and Light. The logic is pretty simple. They both can cast either spell, which the party might need. Only the Cleric can cast Cure Light Wounds. So the Magic-user should be the one to memorize Detect Magic or Light, even though at 1st level the duration for the Clerical version is longer. If healing is not an issue then you should consider the duration of the spells.

Speaking of Light, consider what you can cast it on. You could cast it on a lantern's unlit wick for a lantern you could use normally or even underwater. You could cast it on a copper piece for throwing into areas (pits) to see what's

there. You could cast it on a gem or weapon to make it appear magical, to threaten someone or to try, or sell it to them. Or you can cast it on a foe's eyes to blind them. If they don't manage to run off with your spell - consider removing the monsters head and using it as a lantern until the Light spell's duration runs out.

Speaking of Detect Magic, there are a few ways you can use it. You can try and cast it whenever you enter an area to see if anything in a room is magical. Or cast it before a fight to see which foes are carrying more dangerous weapons or armor. Cast it after a fight to see if anything is worth taking. Casting Detect Magic in every one of those circumstances will require a lot of memorizations. If you only have one spell, you might try dragging all your loot back to one room and then casting Detect Magic over one big pile.

As for magic-users, in my opinion Sleep is the best spell a 1st level magic-user can get. It works on most anything you can run into, affects several foes at once from a distance, and doesn't give them a saving throw. Most other offensive spells affect just one target or give them a saving throw.

Your Magic-user might want to choose spells that work on his party instead of his foes. I was running a low level Magic-user in a low-level party and we had a tough fight ahead. Sleep was not an option with undead. Rather than memorize Magic Missiles I memorized Enlarge spells. I reasoned that it would be better to strengthen the Fighters for a couple of rounds instead of having just 2 shots.

Illusionists don't get much consideration compared to Magic-users. Magic-users have a lot of nifty spells. Illusionists have Phantasmal Force, and that's considerable. Depending on what your DM will allow, an Illusionist could make illusions of almost anything that doesn't make a lot of noise, doesn't stink and isn't on fire. It requires some thought beforehand. An infantry soldier that makes no sound might not be believable - an archer firing arrows from a distance might be. Or a trapdoor that falls out from under a foe's feet into a pit. Snakes or other animals that don't make noise are an option.

A simple rule of thumb would be to say an Illusion spell can have as many hit dice of illusions as the Illusionist has levels. A second level Illusionist using Phantasmal Force can make the Illusion of a 2HD monster or two 1HD monsters.

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If no amount of foreshadowing will deter them [the party] from going or cause them to hesitate, it's not the DM's job to force them to stay alive.

Varl,
Dragonsfoot forums

Keeping 1st Level Parties Alive

by Bryan Fazekas

A common lament among Dungeon Masters (DMs) is the difficulty of keeping low level parties alive. Some DMs seem to kill off party after party, which can dampen the fun for both the DM and the players. There are three questions to answer:

1. Why keep the parties alive?
2. Why is it so difficult to keep them alive?
3. What can be done to reduce unnecessary PC mortality at low levels?

This article addresses these questions from the DM's point of view. There are things the player can do to avoid death, but that is ground not covered in this article.

Please note that this article presents nothing new, nothing revolutionary. It is the collective wisdom of numerous DMs accumulated over the nearly 40 years since the original D&D was published. What this article does is present a fresh look at the possible options, collected in one place, so that DMs can pick out anything that appeals to them to try in their campaigns.

Why Keep PCs Alive?

Why worry about keeping the PCs alive? A lot of DMs don't. They cheerfully kill off entire parties with a grin. Some players are fine with rolling up one or more new characters every game session. If everyone is satisfied, nothing is broken, so don't fix it.

But not all players are happy with that. Some perceive repeated character death as a mistake on their part, which it may well be. Others feel like they are getting no place. D&D is designed for character advancement and most players want their PCs to advance in level, which of course happens only if the PC isn't killed off. Some players may feel like they are in competition with, or being treated unfairly by, the DM.

Having character after character killed can be depressing or aggravating, producing a sense of futility. It's easy to visualize countless players walking away from D&D after failing repeatedly to keep a PC alive. Driving players away, inadvertently or otherwise, is not in the DM's best interest.

This is a problem for the DM as well. If the players all walk away, the campaign folds. Even if they don't, the DM never realizes the opportunity to DM at higher levels since the party keeps getting reset to level 1.

So everyone in the campaign, DM and player alike, probably has a vested interest in keeping the PCs alive. Remember, D&D is a game, and the point of a game is to have fun.

Why So Hard?

What is so hard about keeping 1st level PCs alive? Let us count the ways!

1. Low hit points.
2. Poor armor class.
3. Low damage potential that lengthens combat.
4. Lack of player skill.
5. Limited PC resources and abilities.
6. Poor matching of the encounters to the party's abilities.

Having only a few hit points means that a single attack with an axe, long sword, or broad sword that may inflict as many as 8 hit points of damage is potentially lethal. That kills magic users and thieves outright, kills most clerics and more than half of the fighters. This point isn't hard to understand.

Poor armor class is common for low level PCs who do not have the funds to buy better armor and have not acquired magic items. Again, this point isn't hard to understand.

Unless the players are lucky or the DM uses a generous character generation method, the party probably does not have much in the way of damage bonuses from strength. As with

armor, the party probably hasn't acquired magic weapons or items to increase their damage potential. The longer it takes to kill a monster, the more likely it will kill one or more PCs. We're batting 1,000 on the "not difficult to comprehend" score board.

Point number 4? Yes, poor and/or suicidal choices by players certainly contributes to PC death. However, player actions aren't addressed in this article – this is all about actions the DM can make to improve their campaign, so we'll skip this point.

Limited resources and abilities? The DM must keep in mind that the PCs have few magic items, few spells, and their class abilities will have a relatively low success rate. They will be unlikely to have simple things like silver daggers, making some minor monsters unkillable.

The last point (#6) is the hardest one to get across to some DMs. They have players at the table so they don't believe they're making any mistakes. Yet even if they don't lose players they receive grumbles about frequent PC death, lack of campaign progression, and other player irritations. The DM should look at the situation objectively to determine if they have a problem. Any idiot can kill PCs – the DM is invincible in their campaign and has an infinite number of monsters to throw at the PCs. Challenging the players requires DM ability. This may require the DM to play the role of coach as well as referee to help players (not PCs) increase in skill.

Pull Those Punches!

The easiest way to keep PCs alive is to go easy on them. Ignore die rolls indicating hits on PCs, reduce damage, play the monsters stupidly or cowardly. This keeps the PCs alive and enables the campaign to progress to higher and more exciting levels!

But at what cost?

Mostly long term fun, assuming that the DM doesn't stop pulling punches as the PCs progress in level. Eventually the players realize their PCs can't die. The sense of risk dissipates and the games become just die rolling, a video game without the screen. For many players and DMs – boring.

Should the DM never pull punches? That debate is a fierce one with little middle ground. It is the author's opinion that pulling punches on occasion is fine as long as the players do not realize it is happening. This is typically done when one or more players are having a real run of bad luck, or when the DM misjudges an encounter and makes it more difficult than expected.

It should not be done to rescue the party from poor play. If the party wants to repeatedly perform foolish actions? Let them! It's it not the DM's job to keep the PCs alive if they don't want to be. On the other hand, if one player is acting suicidal in a way that threatens the remainder of the party, pulling punches on the

You Can't Fix Stupid

When isn't it ok to keep the party alive? When they are playing poorly or when one or more PCs is performing actions likely to result in PC death.

This depends heavily upon player experience. With beginners it may be appropriate to pull punches, to ask questions like, "are you sure you want to stick your head in that thing's mouth?", to provide a bit of foreshadowing as a warning. With experienced players it may also be appropriate to ask the questions and give foreshadowing, to give the player a chance to re-think an action.

If they proceed anyway? As comedian Ron White says, "you can't fix stupid". Don't save the party from their own folly?

What if one player is derailing the campaign by repeatedly doing suicidal things? Same answer – let them do it and face the consequences. But avoid spreading those fatal results to the remainder of the party. If a player keeps getting themselves killed, but no one else is harmed? Ideally they'll learn to play better or will quit.

party but not the offending player may be the right thing to do.

PC Death is OK

PC death or the real threat of it should happen with some regularity. Why? Without risk, without the chance of PC death the game is a bunch of dice rolling. With the risk of PC death comes the sense of fear, tension, and adventure that makes the game far more interesting.

D&D is not a video game. The players should not save at a good point, dive in head first and get blown away, restart at the saved point. While it might be fun for a while, the lack of risk to the PCs causes the fun to pale and erode. Conversely, killing PCs off every session is eventually counterproductive. It shows the risk is real, but it prevents campaign progression and often puts the players off.

The obvious choice is to provide the party with some encounters they can win through good play. Make them think and use the tools at hand to succeed. If they fail to play well, PCs may die. If they do play well, PCs may die anyway depending upon the whim of the dice. But the players will gain the sense of accomplishment that comes with good play.

How To Not Kill Parties

Character Generation

The AD&D Players Handbook recommends that PCs have at least two ability attributes of at least 15. Given that most attribute bonuses start when the value is 15, this makes sense.

For most classes, having a high value for the prime attribute means the PC has a better chance of survival. Fighters have hit and damage bonuses so they finish opponents quicker. Clerics get bonus spells, magic users have a better chance to know spells, and thieves gain bonuses on their class skills.

Having a high constitution, dexterity, and charisma score directly affects PC survival. Constitution bonuses give extra hit points, while dexterity affects both armor class and to-hit with missile weapons. High charisma gives the PC better chances of interacting with NPCs in a desired fashion.

What can the DM do? Choose a character generation system that produces good PCs. Give the PCs a better chance of survival by giving them the opportunity of generating a PC with better attributes. If a PC is generated that doesn't have two 15's, discard that character and start over.

The in-game rationale for such superior specimens? Exactly that – the PCs are superior specimens, definitely above average in some ways, so the high attributes are appropriate.

Hit Points

The more hit points (hp) a PC has, the better his/her chances of survival. Stories circulate about having a fighter with 1 hp. Is there anything more ridiculous? Any hit from *anything* renders the PC unconscious or dead. Such a PC would never survive training much less an adventure.

One solution is to award maximum hp at first level. This gives the PCs a better chance of survival, even the magic users who now start with 4 hp plus constitution bonus (if any). Some DMs go as far as awarding maximum hp at each level, and that certainly enhances PC survival.

Others don't award maximum hp but instead award hp that are at least half of the class' HD. For d4 the award is always a 3 or 4, for d6 the award is 4 to 6, for d8 it's 5 to 8, and for d10 it's 6 to 10. This also gives the PCs a good chance of survival. Add in a constitution bonus and the odds of long term survival are greater yet.

The in-game rationale? As with attributes, the PCs are superior specimens, and their training gives them better physical conditioning, stamina, and luck.

Death Point

The original idea was that PCs died when they reached 0 hit points. This rule ensures a high PC mortality rate since there is no wiggle room between life and death. When the PC hits 0 they're dead, roll new character.

AD&D introduced the idea of death occurring when hit points reach -10. A common ruling is that the PC is unconscious but stable when hit points are between 0 and -2, and at -3 or below the PC loses 1 hit point per round due to bleeding, shock, etc. Administering a Healing potion or Cure spell, or simple binding of wounds by another character stops the hit point loss.

This change greatly reduces PC death without making anything easier for them. It also produces role playing situations where the conscious party members must break off combat to tend fallen comrades, and in the post combat time must tend their hurt party members.

A further optional rule is to allow the PC's hit points to go as low as the negative of their constitution score, e.g., if the character's Con is 18 their hit points can go as low as -18 before death occurs. Depending on typical party constitution scores this will even further reduce PC mortality.

Starting Money

An important part of starting a new character is provisioning that character. Dice are rolled for each class to determine starting cash. For fighters a low roll indicates a lack of means to purchase better armor and weapons. This is the same for clerics. For any class it means no funds to purchase protective things such as guard dogs.

The obvious choice is to set a minimum threshold for starting money, and any roll below that value is automatically increased to the minimum. Alternately the DM may award maximum starting money for each class. Regardless of method used the PC starts with sufficient funds to provision themselves with the best that is available.

NPCs and Guard Animals

One way of avoiding death is for the PC to hire/buy a 0-level non-player character (NPC) or a guard animal such as a dog. The idea is that the hireling/animal will assist in combat and will absorb some or all of the damage that would otherwise be inflicted on the PC.

Starting money will impact this option as the PC must have sufficient money to hire or purchase.

In addition the DM must authorize the purchase. Some DMs feel, for whatever reasons, that the PCs need to work on their own and disallow the hire/purchase. Like the options described so far, this generally increases the PC death rate.

Allowing the hire/purchase will reduce the re-rolling of PCs.

Magic Items

The use of magic items certainly changes the odds in favor of the wielder. Some DMs grant the PCs a chance of starting at first level with a minor magic item appropriate for their class. This will typically be a minor item – a weapon, armor, scroll, potion, or miscellaneous magic.

Used wisely even a minor magic item may turn the tide of a battle, snatching victory from the jaws of death. Here the DM must choose wisely to avoid granting the PCs too much power. Items should be relatively minor or with limited charges, say a Wand of Magic Missiles with 5 charges that fires 3 missiles per charge expended. The wielder must conserve the wand for real need or be without the item when a truly dangerous encounter confronts them.

Starting at Higher Level

Many DMs do not start their campaign at 1st level. They may choose to start the PCs at 2nd level, which doubles their hit points and gives them additional abilities include spells. Some start the PCs at 3rd or 4th level, which grant even more initial hit points and class abilities.

Editor's Note: see *Starting at Level One ~ Why Bother?* by Andrew Hamilton, printed in this issue.

This idea is the author's least favorite of all the methods described in this document, barring the idea of going easy on the PC. There is a "magic" of player that 1st level character with so little margin between life and death. But if

the campaign has excessively high 1st level fatalities it may be in the best interests of the campaign to start at a higher level.

Alternately, some campaigns start intentionally at even higher levels, even name level. The idea is to play a higher level party and may have nothing to do with avoiding death at 1st level.

Raising the Dead

Ok, all DM tactics failed and a PC is killed. What next? One answer is to roll up a new PC to replace them. Another is to make available Raise Dead or Resurrection.

In many campaigns the availability of such higher level magics to low level PCs is nil. Some feel that it's a "get out of jail free" card and gives the players too much.

Restoring a PC to life doesn't have to be easy, simple, or cheap. A common tactic is to require a high payment in either gold or magic items. Such may exhaust the party's funds, forcing them back into a dungeon to score more loot.

A better choice for the DM is to require service or a quest as part or all of the price of the Raise Dead or Resurrection. This makes it more expensive for the PCs, and more importantly, gives the DM a solid hook into the next adventure, possibly several adventures. It also gives the PCs an option for a mentor, friend, sage, etc, which can be exploited for many role playing situations by a smart DM. Just as importantly, the players give their DM a solid rationale, a priceless thing. A smart DM will capitalize on such gifts from the players.

Planning Appropriate Encounters

While the preceding ideas are all valuable tools for the DM, nothing surpasses good judgment on the part of the DM. While some advocate total randomness on the part of the DM, the author believes that is laziness. It requires no thought or skill to roll the dice, and the DM is as likely to produce an encounter far too easy for the party as one too hard. The likelihood of generating encounters that are in a sweet spot of the range between just a bit too difficult or too easy is low.

It is a mistake to make every encounter a "killer" encounter. The party either runs from everything – which is hardly fun for the DM or the players – or the party suffers a constant high mortality with the consequences already listed.

Some encounters should be easy for the party although it is a good device to make the encounter appear more difficult than it really is. Such encounters often produce interesting role playing situations where the party may back down from or bribe an inferior monster that they do not recognize.

It is also useful to confront the party with encounters they cannot defeat. The phrase from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* – **run away!** – should be considered a good tactic by the party in some situations. This also produces interesting role playing situations where the party may flee, throw down distractions such as food or valuables, or attempt to bribe a monster to not kill them.

But the DM must provide the players with a possibility of successfully dealing with each situation. Please note that "successfully dealing" with a situation does not mean defeating the monster. It may involve that, but it may just as easily mean treating with a monster, bribing a monster, or running like the wind. If the DM does not provide that "out", PC mortality increases.

Summary

PC death makes the play more exciting for everyone, but pulling out a victory from the jaws of defeat is even more exciting. It's a fine line that the DM must walk.

Each DM has their own opinion and tolerance for rules which will reduce PC mortality at low levels. The above ideas are a collection of ideas used by a wide variety of DMs – it's not likely any DM will use all of them, nor is it recommended. Each DM needs to find their own comfort zone of which rules to implement, which to ignore, and should remember that trying a rule doesn't mean it has to be a permanent fixture of the campaign. Rules that don't work should be discarded in favor of ones that do.

That Savage Kobold: Is Low-Level AD&D Heroic or Not?

by Jeremy Dow

Someone once complained that AD&D is inconsistent because -- although it is designed to be a game of heroic fantasy -- its lethality makes characters very weak and non-heroic. A weak monster such as a kobold can dispatch a low-level magic-user with a single attack. This is especially true at lower levels. If these low-level "heroes" are so weak and easily taken down, that is not very heroic, is it?

Such a criticism could stem from a variety of misconceptions: a lack of understanding of how old-school D&D works, a failure to see those aspects of AD&D that truly are heroic, or a personal definition of heroism that markedly differs from the one that drives AD&D. Players of more recent role-playing games in particular seem to be plagued by these misconceptions.

The person who made the complaint clearly had his or her own definition of hero — that a hero is a powerful figure with superpowers that is nearly impossible to take down. Since AD&D characters at low level are anything but super heroes, the game inevitably failed to live up to that individual's perspective and was written off as non-heroic.

The comic-book superheroes we have grown up with are definitely heroes, for sure, but they are only one kind of hero. Another type of hero can be found in the pages of fantasy literature: the normal individual who knows nothing of magic, swords and monsters but is thrown into the dangerous world of adventuring and must use wits and luck to survive. This was exactly the case with the four hobbits of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy: Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin. It was especially true of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*. They were all simple folk and had little or no desire for adventure. Certainly they would not have gone out and looked for it on their own. They were thrust into it, and once they found themselves in it, they had to rely on their smarts and luck to get them out.

Low-level AD&D characters are somewhere in between: more powerful than the simple hobbit heroes of Tolkien's books but far less powerful than the superheroes of comics. (Perhaps the question should not be, "Is low-level AD&D heroic?" but rather "How heroic is low-level AD&D?")

Going back to our savage kobold and frail low-level magic-user, it is true that the game is lethal, but its lethality is balanced not only by character abilities but also by *player* skills. Some game systems make character success heavily dependent upon character attributes and skills, effectively putting task resolution predominantly in the control of the character rather than the player. In such game systems, it is the character's skills, powers, and advantages that win the day, not the player's skill. In AD&D, however, character success is dependent on both character and player skills. Thus, not only is the player character a hero, but the player is a hero as well.

The Player Character as Hero

First, AD&D player characters (PCs)are not exactly barebones personae. Considerable advantages are built into them due to their class and race, so right out of the gate they are a cut above average, 0-level non-player characters (NPCs). PCs are equipped with special skills that the rank-and-file individual lacks, things such as professional training, spells, combat prowess, stealth, various types of resistance, racial abilities, multi-classing and, in some cases, supernatural powers (such as the paladin's ability to detect evil). A 0-level NPC cannot lay hands to heal a comrade, but a paladin can. A 0-level NPC cannot cast **Sleep** upon a group of marauding kobolds, although he might faint when seeing the evil humanoids. A 0-level NPC cannot command an enemy to do something against his will, but a cleric can. All these extra abilities empower the characters to go toe-to-toe with the monsters they are facing. And that is truly heroic.

In addition to the above-mentioned qualities, the saving throw must not be overlooked. If there is any mechanic that represents the

heroic nature of PCs, it is the saving throw. Those who are accustomed to the abundance of character advantages and edges found in many of today's role-playing games can easily overlook this or casually dismiss it as a weak game mechanic. More than just a simple mechanic to give a PC an edge, this special roll is meant to represent the hero's—and only the hero's—last-ditch effort to resist some deadly effect. It is meant to mimic that edge-of-your-seat moment in movies when it looks like the hero will surely die but, by some sudden, unexpected stroke of luck, skill or insight, finds a way to avoid what would be certain death to the 0-level NPC. In the *Dungeon Masters Guide* (DMG), Gary Gygax wrote "because the player character is all-important, he or she must always—or nearly always—have a chance, no matter how small, a chance of somehow escaping what otherwise would be inevitable destruction. Many will not be able to do so, but the escapes of those who do are what the fabric of the game is created upon. These adventures become the twice-told tales and legends of the campaign."[1] The PCs are the starring heroes of the unfolding drama that is the AD&D campaign, and the saving throw reflects that heroic status.

The Player as Hero

Second, players themselves have significant control over the success of their characters. They greatly increase their characters' chances of survival when they work as a team, plan well, come up with creative solutions, are resourceful, and analyze a situation carefully instead of rashly storming in. The human being behind the fantasy persona is just as much involved in the game as the persona. If Mary, who plays Belara the fighter, makes decisions that directly impact her character as well as the party, she is not just sitting at the gaming table with a pencil, paper and dice; she is also—in a sense—right there in the fantasy world via her imagination, controlling her character. Although this is true of all role-playing games to one degree or another, it is especially true in AD&D, where the lack of abundant skills, feats, and other powers make careful player decisions all the more necessary for character survival.

Sadly, players sometimes work against themselves, effectively making themselves antiheroes. In AD&D this can be disastrous. Many a time a PC is slain—or perhaps even an entire party is decimated—simply because of inadequate tactical planning. Inexperienced players have a tendency to try to solve every problem with a full frontal assault, as though the sword and spell were the only means to overcome a challenge. Although combat plays a major part of the AD&D game, it is not by any means the only way for players to solve problems that the DM throws their way. If players fail to grasp this and bring disaster on themselves, the blame can be laid only at their own feet. Certainly the blame cannot be placed on the game system or the dungeon master. In fact, any dungeon master worth his salt would not keep such PCs from dying, since DM intervention in every deadly circumstance removes the sense of danger in adventuring in a fantasy world, resulting in eventual boredom.

So what can players add to their characters? Teamwork cannot be underestimated. This might seem obvious to many, but today's first-person shooter video games can create in many people who play them an individualistic mind-set that regards a team as unnecessary. This "lone ranger" mentality, however, will not work at all in AD&D, which was specifically designed to make teamwork and collaboration absolutely essential to survival and success. Sooner or later even the doughtiest fighter will need the healing provided by a cleric, and the magic-user will certainly need protection from his or her allies. Everyone has their niche in the adventuring group, and so everyone must do their part. Failure to collaborate will mean the quick death of characters.

Of course, all of the above assumes that players are role-playing their characters correctly. There are players out there who, for one reason or another, will play their characters in ways that are so far outside the box that they fail to leverage their characters' unique capabilities for the benefit of the party. A player who consistently refuses to have his cleric heal the party is an example of this. The

player who has her fighter rush headlong and rashly into battle, thus endangering her comrades, is another.

Seen in this light that frail, low-level magic-user can be a formidable foe in combat if played as part of a functioning team. With a single **Sleep** spell, he can eliminate not just one savage kobold but a whole crowd of them. If his comrades act as his shield, keeping missile weapons and melee attacks from disrupting his spell casting, he is very likely to succeed. Far from being a weak, non-heroic character, he can be a force to be reckoned with, turning the tide of battle in favor of his party.

Finally, we should not forget player creativity. As mentioned above, direct melee combat is not the only option available to players. For example, imagine a thief encountering an ogre outdoors in broad daylight. There is no chance for hiding in shadows or moving silently, so stealth is doomed to failure. Suddenly the player has an idea: When the ogre approaches him, he pretends to faint by falling down right in front of him. If the ruse works, the brute will walk over the thief, who can then rise up and backstab him.

Lethality + Player/Character Abilities = Heroism

AD&D's lethality does not keep it from being a game of heroic fantasy. Yes, it can be lethal. Yes, unknown horrors lurk around corners. Yes, there is a sense that you might not make it home from every encounter. But isn't that how fantasy adventuring is supposed to feel? After all, adventuring is frighteningly dangerous work: You are invading the territory of, attempting to thwart the goals of, and/or aiming to take the treasure of, evil creatures that would find nothing more delightful than to rend you limb from limb. That necessarily brings in a considerable level of lethality. How could it be otherwise? A fantasy world populated by such ruthless, savage beings screams out for a system of combat that makes character death a distinct possibility.

It is this very lethality, though, that heightens the sense of heroism. A character that can easily overcome a challenge is not very heroic because there is nothing brave about that. What is valorous about a man who steps on an ant or brushes aside a mosquito? On the other hand, one that faces a dire threat and survives even when the odds are against him is indeed heroic. The greater the danger, the greater the hero.

That lethality, however, is balanced by character abilities and player skills. When these two are used well, the game is quite heroic and the PCs can be just as lethal as the monsters.

AD&D is a balanced game. The players have enough on their side to give them a reasonable chance for success, but not so much that the challenges are eliminated. That is just one of the things that makes AD&D so endearing. Success is determined not only by character attributes and dice rolls, but by player collaboration, ingenuity, and creativity. The lethality of the game invites — even demands — you, the player, to be involved in the scenarios just as much as your character. Not only are the player characters heroes, but the players themselves are heroes.

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[1] Gary Gygax, Dungeon Masters Guide, (Lake Geneva: TSR Hobbies, Inc., 1979), 80.

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Starting at Level One ~ Why Bother?

by Andrew Hamilton

I can understand the appeal of starting a PC at 1st level every once in a while. It's a challenge, it's "by the book" (at least as some interpret it), it lets a player develop deep emotional attachment to their PC (or not), and it leads to a high body count (well, this part isn't quite as appealing, except to some DM's). Let's be honest, take a look at any published 1st to 3rd level old school adventure and you'll get the distinct impression that this really isn't for a bunch of 1st level PCs. B2 is a classic offender. Ogre? Minotaur? Bugbears? T1 isn't much better. Ghouls? 5th level cleric with 20+ goons! Giant crayfish?

> ***... take a look at any published 1st to 3rd level old school adventure and you'll get the distinct impression that this really isn't for a bunch of 1st level PCs ...***

Yes, theoretically in B2 the PCs should stick to the kobold cave to start with, or the goblin cave (wait, the goblins have the ogre as back-up, right?), but how do they know that ahead of time? It's not like there are signs on all of the caves. If the DM uses anything approaching intelligent tactics the 1st level party is going to do nothing other than add more gear and money to the humanoids' treasure hordes. How many DMs feel somewhat compelled to run the opponents of 1st level parties as complete incompetents (like the villains in a kids' movie). That's not fun either.

Successful adventuring at 1st level looks a lot like this: travel to the dungeon, enter, fight, loot, leave after a single encounter and heal. Come back tomorrow and clear another room. The single smartest thing that a 1st level party can do is run away from every encounter, hoping to stumble upon unguarded treasure. When all you have is 6 hit points it takes only one hot roll and you're a goner. There is no margin for error, no ability to survive an unlucky die roll. Heck, a kobold can chuck a rock at a 1st level magic-user and kill him half the time! The 1st level cleric has little choice but to memorize nothing but Cure Light Wounds.

When starting a party at 2nd level I'm not advocating handing out a bunch of extra equipment, gold, or magical items. Start the PC out with the 1st level resources, maybe adding a mundane item or two. What I would not do in a case where I let PCs start out at 2nd level is provide them with additional starting cash, or magical items, etc. I'd give them the by the book 1st level resources. The point is to give them a tad more staying power and survivability, not to make them over-powering.

As a PC, you have twice the hit points at second level as you do at first. Now you can mix it up a little bit, actually take a hit and survive to run away. This feels a little more like adventuring. Magic-users can cast 2 spells, clerics might be able to add something to their spell repertoire other than Cure Light Wounds, fighter-types can attack those under 1 HD critters twice each round. A 2nd level PC is still far from being a power house, and they will still find those classic adventures challenging and deadly.

In addition to having twice the hit points, twice the spells, and a slightly better chance to actually successfully use a thieving skill, a party should be able to adventure twice as long as a 1st level party (in the same dungeon) before retreating to rest and resupply. This means that everyone gets twice the playing time and twice the fun.

And is it really such a stretch to imagine that PCs have reached 2nd level? If a DM feels a need to explain it (I personally do only as part of a back story, not as a mechanic), maybe this would help.

Case Study 1: Fighter

This fighter was in the militia or guard, and drilled regularly. Maybe he brawled a little (or a

lot) as well. According to the DMG, he could start play at the tender age of 16. If he "beats" a man-at-arms (d4+4 hp, or 1 HD equiv) once a week in training, then it takes (2001 xp/16.5 xpv) 122 weeks to accumulate enough experience points (xp) to advance to 2nd level. Even at a 50% experience penalty for non-lethal combat, that's 244 weeks, or less than 5 years. Now our PC starts at 2nd level at the age of 19 to 21. Of course one could argue that such a skilled fighter would likely be looking for more frequent opportunities to train (maybe two to four bouts a week), and seeking out more skilled training partners (like another 1st level fighter). A fighter showing such promise might get special training from a master-at-arms. Rangers, I'd just hand wave it and talk about all the dangerous predators, like dogs, wolves, and feral MM2 cats they've hunted and killed.

Case Study 2: Thief

The thief is a simple case. He steals some "money" or other "treasure", and gets some experience for it. Totally by the book in 1E. It doesn't have to be just a money pouch either. A backpack full of clothes is worth a few gp. How about stealing a meal, someone's boots, a horse, etc. Eavesdrop and sell some info. Maybe he snatched something worth a lot, and is now on the run.

Case Study 3: Magic-User

Take a page out of *Dragon* #123. A magic-user helping his master teach a few more apprentices and simultaneously studying could be accumulating 100 xp or more per month, so about 2 years to reach 2nd level. Conceptually, a similar structure would work for clerics.

Now, I have to admit that the barbarian sticks out as a bit of a concern, making them 2nd level is 6,001 free experience points! Even in this case I wouldn't get too fussed. That barbarian will be back a few levels behind everyone in very short order.

So, why should a campaign start out at second level? Starting at 2nd level can be far more enjoyable, for everyone involved. The DM wins because he can get the party into the thick of things sooner, which is more fun (the point), and the players can face greater challenges (also more fun for them).

Lunch Tokens

by Ralph Glatt

These steel coins were created by a wizard to feed his army. The coins displayed the wizard's image on one side and a flagon on the other. When tossed into the air and a command word is spoken, each turns into a single meal.

The original coins worked as follows: If "breakfast" was spoken the meal was cooked eggs, bacon, and tea. If "lunch" was spoken a wedge of cheese, small loaf of bread, and a cup of wine was produced. "Dinner" created cooked meat (beef, pork, chicken, or fish), a vegetable, fruit, and a cup of ale.

The tokens were easier to carry than rations, and there was no chance of spoiled food. The process of making the tokens is highly secreted, and would make a good adventure or major quest.

Other coins are rumored to exist that produce other meals, and produce meals for mounts and draft animals.

Balanced Character Generation

by Nicole Massey

"My characters suck. My dice hate me."

How often have you heard this from players? What's a DM to do? Though excellent role-players can take any character and make interesting things come out no matter what the rolls, it can also be a problem when truly dreadful characters are rolled up. Who has time to spend rolling dice forever? Also, there's the trust factor – what do you do when a character has three 18's and the player claimed to roll them ? This can cause problems not only with the character, but from other players who feel they're not getting a fair shake.

I'm not saying the suggestions below are going to work for everyone. And they are definitely not "by the book" in their approach. But I've had good luck using them, they minimize problems, and speed character generation .

Ability Scores

There's an old tournament method of character generation that is useful – divide 85 points across six stats, 18's cost an extra point. This levels the playing field, as all characters have equal points starting out. Since I'm blind and can't see what dice are being rolled it gives me an extra comfort level too, as I can plug any character into a spreadsheet and get calculations that tell me if the player has followed my rules. This is before any adjustments for race.

The positive side of this is that everyone starts out on an even field. Any racial minimums can be taken care of in the point buys without worrying about anything being too low.

Why six stats? Comeliness wasn't adopted by everyone, and it's a problematic stat as it builds off Charisma for some of its value. In settings where I use it I tell players it matches their charisma, and they can take points off other stats to raise it but cannot lower it to gain points.

With this system you have to use Charisma as something that matters to players in your game or players use Charisma as a dump stat. One thing that helps in my games is that if folks don't play their ability scores they lose experience points.

There are some class combinations where 85 points won't work, like the Ranger/Druid combinations that Gary Gygax introduced in his Sorcerer's Scroll column in *Dragon* #96 (*New Jobs for Demihumans*). In that case we just raise any stat that doesn't quite make it to the minimums. The player has to get as close as possible, though, and there are some things they won't be able to do, especially the higher level spells. That's the cost for them choosing to play a multi-class character instead of a pure class one.

Hit Points

I adopted the policy of maximum hit points for first level a while ago. It increases the chances of survivability for first level characters. This resolves one of the other major character killer complaints that players whine about.

Starting Money

Like hit points, I give players the maximum starting money. It's rough starting out with the minimum, and this represents the character's life savings. So I don't have a big problem with that.

Extraordinary Strength

Now we get to one of the places where I don't let the character avoid random chance. If a fighter has an 18 strength then they roll for their extraordinary strength. However, each 10 points of extra strength counts one additional point, just like if they were using a wish to raise it, so an automatic 18.20 would count 22 points – 19 points for the 18, 1 point for the extra 10, and

two more points for the extra 10 to make it 20. This also means that an automatic 18.00 would cost 69 points. With a minimum of 3 points for each ability score that would leave one point for the fighter to put on something else, so it's not worth it. But hey, if the player wants to spend the points, that's their choice. (I wouldn't, not in a year's worth of Sundays)

It's obvious to most people at this point that it's possible to min/max a character using this system. But the needs for balanced characters makes the difference – in a well run campaign most ability scores will need to be at least reasonable to help with survival. Smart players get this, while those obsessed with the extremes don't, and suffer for it.

Social Status

Social status is another area where those using the Unearthed Arcana (UA) generally have to do a die roll. I handle it a different way.

In my game there are consequences for each social level. I use ten levels – Lower Lower class, Middle Lower Class, Upper Lower Class, Lower Middle Class, Middle Middle Class, Upper Middle Class, Lower Upper Class, Middle Upper Class, Upper Upper Class, and Royalty. On the low end of the spectrum there's the problem of money – it's hard to generate much money at that level. Usually this affects starting money, but I work around that, as instead of buying things the friends, family, and neighbors make things or give them as gifts. The only place where this affects things is in the area of quality. A LLC character isn't going to have a superior tent or several mundane magic items in their stuff. But there's a huge advantage for this lower end of the economic spectrum, as what the character lacks in funds is made up in allies. Those on the bottom tier have to rely on each other to survive, and this can be a big help when trouble makes its way to your door. So all lower economic class characters have this benefit.

On the other hand, upper class folks lose a lot of freedom. Unless a Royal sneaks out of the house there's no way he or she is going adventuring without a cadre of armed guards.

85 Points for the Mathematically Challenged

Some folks won't have an easy time with the addition involved in arranging 85 points across six ability scores. For those with this problem, here's another approach that makes it a bit easier.

Start with all ability scores at 14.

1. Add one point to the prime ability score for the class. Now all 85 points have been allocated.
2. Raise one ability score by a point or two by lowering another one the same amount. Now you're still at 85 points, but some are lower than 14 and some are higher. Remember the extra point required for an 18.
3. Repeat as needed to get the ability scores the way you like them.
4. This method is simple to use, and allows you to do ability score generation quickly and without lots of adding things together.

Example: Bruce wants a Fighter. So he puts a point in strength, making it fifteen. He takes four points off intelligence, dropping it to 10, and boosts his strength to 18. (Remember the extra point for 18's) But he isn't done. He drops his Wisdom to 9 and pushes his constitution to 18 so he can get those four points per hit die each level from the constitution bonus. And he drops one point each off Intelligence, wisdom, and Charisma to boost Dexterity to 17. He could remove more points to improve his exceptional strength, but he knows that he's already in rough water now with the low intelligence and Wisdom scores, so he stops here. His fighter has the following Ability Scores:

Strength: 18, with a pending roll for exceptional strength.

Intelligence: 9

Wisdom: 8

It's hard to gain much experience when a dozen men kill everything for you. Such excursions are very goal oriented, too, so wandering around in search of adventure is just not done, and the occasional shady character that might be the one to introduce the party to an adventure is going to avoid a Royal like an Orcish Brothel. So playing a royal, though wonderful for resources, (name it and you'll have it as soon as it can be made) there's not much fun in it. This is the same for Upper Upper Class, as everyone on this level is either upper nobility (Dukes, Earls, Counts, Viscounts, and maybe some well placed Barons) or high in status some other way, like being highly ranked in the clergy or one of the top spell casters. (And these latter two don't extend to their families) So within reason Middle Upper Class is where most adventurers start.

What I do is sit down with the player and ask them what kind of character they want to play. In these conversations we determine the character's social status, so instead of using a random determination they give me an idea of where the character fits in that range. Then any adjustments to money, henchmen, and the like are made.

Psionics

Psionics is another place where a random die roll is not an avoidable thing. I use psionics extensively in my game, to the extent that there is a psionicists guild that governs all career psionicists, and I use a class of my own design loosely based on the one from the *Dragon*, but more based on the Ninja from Oriental Adventures. (Look for it when we do an issue on Psionics in the future.) But some folks have rogue psionics talents, and those are handled like Appendix A in the Player's Handbook.

In this case it's time to get out the dice. I've tried to figure out a way to handle this with points instead of rolling, but there just isn't a good way, as any points not spent on psionics would unbalance other character types. It has been suggested that I do things like provide a +1 weapon or shield, or do something else similar, but that doesn't really do the job and I don't want to give that kind of benefit to another character. So die rolling is the order of the day.

85 Points for the Mathematically Challenged -- *continued*

Constitution: 18

Dexterity: 17

Charisma: 13 (He thinks a true heroic warrior should be charming to win the ladies' hearts)

He's done with ability scores except for a roll for exceptional strength, and his hit points and starting money are already determined. Now he will have a chat with his DM about social status, roll one die, (He has no chance of Psionics) and then spend his money and choose weapons and skills. With any luck this entire process will take an hour or so, and then they can start play.

You will have to determine what races can have Psionic ability. Some have it listed in the Monster Manual but aren't in the appendix as options. And don't forget that Grey Dwarves have a higher chance of psionics as a racial bonus. Whether elves can have psionics as player characters is up to the DM.

I don't allow any die rolls to be done outside of my presence, and I also require a neutral observer. For folks with functional eyesight the observer isn't required, of course, but it's a good idea to avoid any claims of cheating or special treatment.

Classes

I leave the class selection up to the character within the range of accepted classes and class combinations. Each DM will have their own decisions governing these things. But ability scores too low to meet class minimums must be readjusted, and if they still don't reach the bottom then it's fair to adjust them up above the 85 point total, as mentioned earlier. Party members are advised to choose classes that

help the party survive, and the DM will suggest such things so the party isn't killed first thing out because it's got nothing but magic-users in it or they're missing healers.

Characters from other campaigns

This also solves the problem of characters from other campaigns. Anyone who creates a character using the above rules is welcome in my campaign – at first level with no items besides the initial use of starting money. Since everything is on a level playing field, I have no problem in letting a character from another game in, but not with any of the development or advancement they gained in the other game. My game takes place in a dimension far removed from any other game dimension, (with one exception) and as such the character may be the same person, or at least an iteration of the same person, but at the start of his or her adventuring career. This is of course not what players want when trying to import a character, but it's the rules – I have no desire to import other DM's problems into my game.

This system has another benefit – as mentioned at the beginning, it's great for creating tournament characters. In settings where Psionics wouldn't be an issue, you can create a tournament character pretty quickly in a simple spreadsheet.

Everything Else

Characters buy their equipment, armor themselves, pick weapons, calculate encumbrance, hire hirelings, purchase pets and draft animals, and in general do everything else as per the rules. This system works well for providing balanced characters, and no one complains about their die rolls except for exceptional strength or psionics, both of which are powerful extensions to characters, and anyone complaining about these is expecting too much.

One More Option

For DM's who don't like the point buy system, I've seen another option that creates balanced characters.

Each character has ability scores ranging from 13 to 18, and they can arrange them any way they like. Note that it's possible to encounter two 18's with this system for demi-humans who have bonuses to ability scores, and a 19 is possible too. (Dwarf constitution, elf or Halfling dexterity, for example)I feel it can be a bit powerful, but it's an option if some DM's want to use it.

Conclusion

The Balanced Character Generation system creates balanced characters that don't have any seriously low ability scores unless the player wants them. It gives each character a fighting chance to survive, and die rolling is minimized which reduces concerns about players who are facing honesty challenges. This minimizes player strife, and I've noticed that the character generation time is reduced. It works well in my campaign, and I've been using it for almost three decades.

"How the hell are we supposed to kill a guy who can fly, turn invisible, cast fireballs, and is totally disinterested in fighting to the death?"
druid Dieter,
in SirAllen's campaign,
posted on Dragonsfoot forums

Characters with History

by Andrew Hamilton

You're sitting in a dark tavern when a mysterious stranger approaches you. "I understand that you're adventurers" he says, and motions towards a seat, "and I've an opportunity for you. May I sit down?" Sounds all too familiar doesn't it? We've all started out a campaign as either player or DM with something like the section above. There are a lot of benefits to starting out this way, not the least of which is that it lets us get right to the adventuring, and these days, who has time to waste? In some cases (one shots, tournaments, etc.) character background borders on pointless .

All of that aside, it can be unsatisfying as a means of kicking off a campaign. With a little bit of work the formation of an adventuring party can be role-played in a manner that makes the process feel natural, provides a few encounters to build up player character (PC) experience and resources, and more importantly gives each PC one or more contacts and a rival or two. If the players and DM don't know each other it offers them an opportunity to get to know each other in a more relaxed situation than a dungeon. Just as importantly, it provides the DM the opportunity to scatter a few plot hooks, and lets the players "tell" the DM what they are looking for in a campaign. And it also presents a subtle hint that the focus here will be on role-playing.

This article examines (1) the pre-work necessary for such a process, (2) the mechanisms that can be used to bring a party together "organically", (3) the benefits of such a process, and (4) some of the downsides.

DM Pre-Work

The DM requires a small defined area where the starting play will happen, what is sometimes known as a "sand-box", and the time (an hour or three) to work with each player. He or she also needs buy-in from the players that they like and will be willing to play in this particular sandbox.

The players require a brief background of the sandbox, a PC and a character concept, including a few bullet points about the character's history.

- How did they learn their trade/class?
- Why do they want to adventure?
- What are their hobbies?
- What does a normal day look like (before they become an adventurer)?

The Mechanism

The DM takes the character concepts and their sandbox/home base, and compares the two. The DM creates and plays a few encounters for each PC, letting them round out their history, and gain some experience points (xp) before things get life and death.

The specific campaign needs to be taken into account, as there will be differences in rural and urban campaigns. A campaign where the party starts out as local heroes is easier to create that sense of shared community and history, but an urban or cross-roads start helps explain a greater variety in PC class, race, and background.

This is an opportunity to create a few rivalries and alliances for the PCs.

The process is five steps:

1. Determine the starting environment.
2. Decide how much adventure is close to home and whether it's worth establishing connections.
3. Decide whether the campaign has a point and how to seed some very subtle connections to that point.
4. Review the time commitment and how these behind the scenes and background

encounters can be played by e-mail to save time.

5. Get the players onboard.

Following are examples for the four core classes.

Fighter

For example, consider a fighter type from a rural environment who grew up tending the herds (along with his faithful dog), hunting when he got a chance, and learn to fight by rough-housing with his older brothers and cousins before joining the militia at the age of 12. His daily routine is chopping firewood and hauling water (which explains the muscles), checking on the flocks, repairing fences and doing yard maintenance, and then having some of the evening to relax with friends and drill with the militia. One day a week he might get out hunting to put meat on the table.

In this case our budding fighter spent time watching the family flock of sheep and has driven off wild dogs with a longbow (handed down from his grandfather), so he may have already accumulated some xp. Those wild dogs (1+1 HD) are worth a few xp (about 30 apiece). A few years of that while growing up and it's not unreasonable that a character has gained a few hundred xp. The DM can play through such an encounter, perhaps his loyal dog saves him, explaining why the PC likes dogs and why he starts off with a long bow and a guard dog for free.

Our fighter and a few friends (other PCs perhaps) go hunting often, so the DM can hand wave bringing down a large deer or elk (3 HD, so possibly 70 xp per hunt!), and then have a black bear or wolf pack show up while they're butchering it. What do they do? They should be able to scare it off without a violent confrontation? The hunters (if they are more than one PC) have faced danger now as a group, are probably feeling pretty tough, and have a history of sticking together in dangerous spots.

He learned sword play and using a spear in the militia. Here is a chance to role-play some drill and fighting, including weapons practice with a tough old sergeant (F2 or F3), and give the PC some experience for getting his butt kicked by a grizzled old geezer. Treated with respect, this old fellow can provide lots of advice, a letter of introduction, and has stories about when he was a young man at arms working for adventurers. (A sharp young man looking for ways to make his name could listen to these endless stories and figure out some great dungeons to raid while also picking up some fighting tips, and if the old man has a map or two…) Is more than one PC a member of the militia? Here's a chance for them to fight it out, gaining some valuable insight to how they'd fight side by side.

Here's another scenario: a local child goes missing and search parties are sent out. They find the child, but notice strange tracks (small feet, like goblins?). Here's a chance for the party to work as a team, while the DM plants campaign seeds about the goblin scouts.

Ideas are without limit. Flirting with a local girl (or defending the honor of his or a friend's sister) in a tavern leads to an exchange of words with a caravan guard (F1) and that ends in a brawl. A mercenary officer and/or the local militia step in if weapons are drawn to avoid unnecessary PC fatalities. The less disciplined

The Big City

My bias is showing as I've discussed the rural campaign setting at length.

The big city campaign can be kicked off in a similar manner, and allows for slightly easier integration of eclectic character choices. All one needs to do (for example) is figure out how their samurai PC got on the ship that brought him to this port. Maybe the fighter grew up here, got in trouble and stayed out of jail by "volunteering" to spend a few years in the Guard.

That's where he met the pick-pocket, who "met" the samurai due to a failed pick pockets roll. The ex-Guardsman helped the thief keep his head, but had to cut a deal with the samurai to do so.

guard gets run off - but he reappears with some 0 level men at arms as a bandit in the next adventure, at which time he may have increased in level.

Another young fighter in the militia, neither friend nor foe (another chance for drill and xp) signs up with the caravan. He comes back blooded and with gear and money, and is now a local celebrity. This might be a contact or future ally, and in any case provides incentive to "go make something of one's self".

Magic-User

What kind of opportunities exist for the other classes in a small town you might ask?

For a magic-user, a slightly more experienced apprentice gets sent on a task and comes back bragging about it, sowing the seeds of a rivalry. Our apprentice gets sent to collect flowers for use in a potion. Then they get to help brew the potion, gain a few xp, and maybe even the potion!

The magic-user drills with the militia too, getting knocked around a fair bit. Maybe when a brawl starts, the magic-user "calms things down" with a well timed sleep spell. Perhaps the magic-user earns some coin with the mending spell that his master taught him as a means of teaching the apprentice that the value of magic isn't just in having fancy ways to blow things up.

Cleric

The cleric gets sent to work with another member of the church, a bit of a pain this cleric becomes a rival member of the faith. The rival gets good donations, etc. and outshines the PC in the eyes of the church hierarchy -- even though they can't adventure to save their souls.

The cleric gets sent on the rounds to visit some of the faithful who live outside of town, along the way they cast a spell to cure an injury or two, hear tales of something stealing sheep, maybe assist a lone traveler.

Other Classes

This system is easily adapted to classes such as the ranger and barbarian who aren't much different than our country boy turned fighter. Others are more problematic, such as the illusionist and assassin, which cherish secrecy & misdirection. Or, oddball choices, like the noble born cavalier who is going to adventure with a group of local, rural adventurers. Well, no one said the DM had an easy job.

Let's examine the cavalier for example -- a challenge, given that cavaliers are not really a clean fit in the average adventuring party. Our young noble has grown up living a life of plenty, constantly being told that he is superior to the "common folk". Never wanting for anything, there is no doubt that he has worked hard to learn the skills that set the cavalier apart from a fighter. There will be many opportunities for the DM and the cavalier's player to role play a few jousts and melees during the youngster's formative years. Other opportunities such as balls and formal feasts create opportunities to make allies and rivals.

The trick is getting the young cavalier on the road, and seeking the company of common born adventurers. One could fall back on the "youngest son of a noble family fallen from grace, no way to make his way in the world other than by skill at arms". Cliché certainly, but not necessarily without merit.

But our player may want a different background. Perhaps the cavalier takes an interest in the wrong maiden and receives a thrashing at the hands of her betrothed or brother (or both). In shame, the cavalier packs up and leaves. In this case he might seek to conceal his identity until he has gained some glory and fame. Another option would be to have some other noble accuse the cavalier of cloaking himself in the glory & deeds of his

Thief

Assuming this fellow isn't so larcenous that he's stealing from the very folk that raised him, he might get asked to climb a tree to rescue a cat (perhaps an old magic-user's familiar, and she takes a liking to the rogue and asks that he accompany her apprentice on a short task to collect some flowers from a tree, coin, experience and a meeting with a party member follow?).

He can go hunting with the fighter, and drill with the militia. In a bar room brawl, a well placed mug or bottle from behind might create all the breathing room his brawny friends need to win a fight.

And don't forget that anything that has been stolen can be stolen again, making the "expert in getting into secured places and removing things" of value to the church hierarchy or local Wizard in retrieving something taken by thieves or even the local tax collector. This gains both allies and adversaries in a single action.

It is important that the DM use the last few encounters in such a sequence to connect the party members. That grizzled old soldier might be a faithful follower of the local church, and direct the church's young acolyte to the fighter as a sparring companion. Or he may be the thief's uncle, and ask the fighter to teach the thief a bit about stalking and hunting animals.

Drawbacks

If the DM's plan is to get the party the heck out of Hometown, then creating such a background and network of contacts is a waste of time. Just have the party meet at the tavern for breakfast and start walking.

As well, like any sand box, the DM has to be prepared to let the players chart the course. If they want to sign on as caravan guards and travel to the King's City, it doesn't matter that you've created a great cave crawl with stirges, goblins, centipedes and some cool traps and treasure.

This takes time, time that players and the DM may not have, and does place a larger burden on the DM (1 hour per player might be 5 or 6 hours of DM time).

Another drawback is the amount of emotional investment that this can result in. If the player's lose a PC or two to their first encounter with kobolds after a process like this, there may be some hard feelings. A good sense of the maturity level of the player's is a pre-requisite for this process.

Benefits

Now we're almost ready to start the campaign and our fighter has a few hundred experience points, a mentor, a friendly rival (and possible

Other Classes -- continued

grandfather, and comment that the cavalier is incapable of achieving anything on their own. Such an insult could well propel the cavalier onto the road seeking adventure, fame and glory.

In these cases, some way to connect the lone noble with the locals is necessary. Perhaps the cavalier has his horse stolen (or scared off) by some bandits (who then outrun the heavily armored cavalier). In the case of the stolen horse, the adventure begins as the local heroes have a grudge against the bandits (perhaps they stole a cart of turnips from a local farmer known to the fighter and the cleric), so the cavalier joins them to exact revenge and get his horse back.

If the horse ran off, it's unlikely that the cavalier knows how to track it, but our young fighter returning from a hunt certainly does (and will do so for a meal at the tavern). Feeling indebted, the cavalier offers to discharge this debt by aiding the fighter in some undertaking, and when the various local boys start talking about goblin tracks, mysterious sheep disappearances and other goings-on, how can the cavalier resist saving these folk from the evil lurking over the hill?

ally), a loyal guard dog, loyal friends, and a hostile rival. He also has a few leads to adventure (goblins, some ruins or caves they've seen while hunting, tales from the retired soldier, etc.). One or two more encounters can provide some additional experience and equipment (maybe an uncle has an old sword and shield, but the fighter will have to round up some cattle, drive them into town, and get the money back).

This can explain how our starting Fighter PC has certain equipment that exceeds the starting monetary limits (like the war dog and a nice sword, shield and helmet, along with a longbow) and increases the survival rate of a starting PC. It can even be used as a way of explaining why the PCs are starting out at level 2 (if that's how the DM likes to roll).

The same can be done for each PC, and then they get the opportunity to compare notes, and decide which part of the sandbox they want to play in. The players now have a few adventure leads to follow up on, and perhaps some vested interests in one or more of the adventure opportunities.

These background encounters can be completed with some hand waving, and winks and nods to the rules and dice rolling (or have the players roll d20 and d6 30 times when they create their character). This lets the scenarios be played out by e-mail which also creates a nice record for the DM to cut and paste from. The background adventures may be played out one on one (or two on one) without consuming face to face table time.

In a campaign like this, the opportunity for some one on one or two on one side adventures also gets opened up (now that you're a seasoned warrior, you've been asked to lead a unit of the militia in drill, something has been eating your pa's chickens, go collect some giant spider web for this potion, etc.).

Obviously, the DM needs to be careful with these "side adventures", as an over eager player can consume the DM's time and get ahead of the rest of the party. The cries of "favoritism" will follow shortly thereafter. There are a few advantages however, primarily the ability to keep the interest of players during lulls in play (such as when most of the players have real life commitments that keep them from the table).

The DM will need to consider how to address those players who can't take advantage of such side adventures. If it's only a matter of a few hundred xp, it's probably not a big issue. If it's a few hundred xp here, and another hundred there, and all of a sudden we're talking several thousand xp, then the DM probably needs to give the PCs of non-available players an xp kicker and do some hand waving to say "time passes, you trained and adventured, and now the party is together again".

Hopefully these thoughts have inspired thoughts and plots of your own, and a new campaign or two has been inspired. Good luck and good adventuring to you.

Stone of Sharpening

by Andrew Hamilton

This dark grey whetstone detects as magic. Once per day it can be used to sharpen a non-magical bladed weapon, producing a very sharp edge. The weapon attains +1 to-hit and damage for 1d4 rounds of combat, and will damage creatures requiring +1 weapons to hit.

Do you have humorous or interesting anecdotes from your campaign? Send us real quotes from your game and we will publish the best ones!
submissions@and-mag.com

Creature Feature: Ecology of the Carrion Crab

by Nicole Massey and Bryan Fazekas

"I have never heard of orcs eating their own dead," David interjected.

Hal pounded his fist on the table in fury. The man was well into his cups, it being just after lunch time, and he brooked no disagreement with his tale. "ORCS EAT THEIR DEAD!!! I damned well was there and saw it with my own two eyes!"

At age 12 David was not dissuaded by fury, so he continued to prod. "That is NOT what you said, Hal. You said you came back and the bones were picked clean."

Hal was probably somewhere between 50 and 80, but years of hard drinking made it hard to tell. He had been a fixture in the tavern for five years, telling stories of his adventuring days in exchange for drinks. The tavern owner tolerated him because he was mostly entertaining and he brought some business her way. She wasn't pleased that David was prodding the old man yet again, but tolerated the boy's presence because of his grandparents. Well, maybe not grandparents, but they treated the boy same as they did their actual grandson Jake.

Pounding the table again in even greater fury Hal howled, "Don't tell me what I said! I know what I said!"

Several of the listeners finished their drinks and got up to leave. Focused on the boy the old man didn't even realize he was losing his audience, and more importantly, more ale. Not that he needed more. Another ale and he'd spew instead of wandering off to sleep, before coming back after dark for another round of ales-for-tales.

David grinned impudently in the face of ire. "David!" a voice commanded. "Leave off pestering people!"

The grin vanished at the sound of his tutor's voice. Bisonbit was no fun, and besides, Hal was full of horse dung all the way up to his eyeballs! Grudgingly he got up and turned away, reflexively evading the awkward swipe the old man made at him. Finally realizing his audience was gone, Hal drained the little bit of ale left in his mug and settled his head on his arms, snoring before his head touched his arm.

David's mood swings were legendary for their quickness, but rarely was he downbeat. His native intelligence and lack of anything resembling good sense combined to make him upbeat. "Let's go ask Trajan, he knows everything!"

"We have only half an hour before lessons begin. Make it quick!" Barely five years older than David, Bisonbit was a stodgy jerk.

"*He's no fun!*" David thought, "*but he wants to know too!*"

They found Trajan in his garden, weeding, Jake in the next row over helping with the work.

"Trajan! Do orcs eat their dead?"

The old man straightened up stiffly. He was probably a lot older than Hal, but even advanced age hadn't wounded him too badly. His eyes were clear and he displayed evidence of having been a powerful man in his youth. Two years earlier robbers had discovered the old man could still swing a sword, to their short-lived chagrin.

"Is Hal still claiming that?" he grinned. Trajan rarely said anything bad about anyone, but Hal's foolish tales brought him closer to it than anyone else could.

"What eats bodies?"

Dusting his hands off he walked to a nearby bench and sat. "Lot of things eat dead bodies. That's what Hal said, one time when he told the tale while sober "

"Hal has been sober?" Bisonbit interjected with ill grace. The young cleric/tutor was usually polite but he didn't like the old one-armed braggart and quietly questioned how he had lost his right forearm, especially since that tale varied depending on audience and ale.

"No picking on Hal. Do you want to hear my tale?" The silence affirmed the desire, so Trajan continued. "Could have been several beasties, but likely it was carrion crabs. They are more-or-less not dangerous, but some times they kill fools and eat well …"

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Trajan and Etjar chased the orcs through the tunnels, each catching one orc and then another, hacking them down from behind. Figuring the remainder of the band would flee until their legs fell off, they stopped the chase and turned back. Big men who covered distance quickly, they hadn't gone far when they heard someone moving up quickly, panting hard. Weapons ready they waited as a woman ran around the corner in the tunnel under the old ruined town. Catching sight of them she stopped, fighting staff at the ready.

"What did you two fools think you were doing?" she snarled at them. Fixing Etjar with her baleful eye she spat, "THAT fool I'd expect it, but you mostly have more sense than that!" She didn't even look at Trajan.

"*Just as well, if she lights into me now I'm going to paddle her behind!*" the young soldier thought.

Etjar's deep voice resonated. "There was more of them than us. We had surprise but if they turned on us again we'd be in trouble. Better to put fear in them and drive them off before they think. Tonight they'll be telling tales of the two dozen humans who died while the orcs fought and drove them off." He ended his reasoning with a small grin. Etjar knew how orcs, like any bully, were terrible braggarts who would make their fleeing from a small band of humans into something heroic. By the third cup ale the orc would probably believe their own tale.

Marissa stared up at the man. Grudgingly she broke the stare and backed off. "Maybe you're right. What's done is done. Tessac is dead and Lesang is badly wounded, cut along the ribs. I bound the wound before chasing off after you pair of ninnies."

"Dead?" Ejtar asked, puzzled.

"Yah. He had an artery cut, and bled out before I could help him. I was helping Lesang, didn't realize Tessac was badly hurt.

The woman backed off on her ire, although Marissa rarely backed off anything completely. "*At least she shut up*," thought Trajan acidly.

Trajan led the way, his sense of direction unerring in leading them back through the maze of tunnels. Before they got to the scene of the battle they found Lesang, crawling, leaving a trail of blood. He was making incoherent sounds as he scrambled frantically along. Ten feet behind him were three large land crabs, their shells 2' in diameter. The things patiently paced the crawling man.

"What are those?" asked Marissa. A native of Sathea, she had been a city girl before leaving the city under unnamed circumstances and taking up with the pair of soldiers.

"Carrion crabs," Trajan commented. "Big ones. They eat carrion. Never heard of them going after anything live."

"Looks like these are. Wonder if they're good eating?"

"You're thinking of your stomach at a time like this?" The woman spat incredulously.

Etjar snarked, "If I don't think of my stomach, no one else will." With that he stepped towards the crabs who scuttled together in a defensive formation, but didn't run off. Suddenly he lunged forward, bringing his long sword down on the nearest crab's shell. The shell was hard, it cracked but didn't shear through as he expected. Still, the force of the blow made a double crack as the crab's shell hit the floor. The other two backed off further as the damaged one squirmed its 10 legs frantically. It was done for, it just hadn't quit yet.

With no hesitation Trajan did the same, smashing a shell with his heavy hand-and-a-half bastard sword. The heavier sword cleaved the shell, and without missing a beat he caught the third crab as it scuttled back. "Easy enough to kill."

"Shoot!" Turning back both men saw the young wizard crouched by Lesang. "He tore his wounds open, enough to bleed out." Both men swore. They hadn't traveled with Tessac and Lesang long but both men had been good companions, pretty good in a fight although not as seasoned as the two soldiers.

Sheathing their weapons they picked up their companion's body. "Let get him out of here and give him a decent burial. Least we can do."

Moving slowly down the tunnel they came to a large room, the one where a band of a dozen orcs had tried to ambush them, failing miserably. Well, not that miserably; the human party lost 40% of its force. Looking into the room they saw two surprises.

Tessac and three dead orcs were being torn apart and eaten by groups of crabs, while another group circled and threatened a strange creature. It looked like an animated mushroom, roughly 4' tall. The cone at the top was sharply tapered so it appeared tall and thin, enough though it was shorter even than Marissa.

"What is THAT?" Marissa ask, gesturing at the walking mushroom.

"NO idea," Trajan replied. Etjar shook his head, agreeing silently with his partner.

"I'm not letting them eat Tessac." Trajan stepped forward waving his arms, hoping to scare off the ones eating Tessac. He wasn't concerned about the orcs. In response the crabs hissed at him, and the ones worrying the orcs turned to face him. The ones menacing the animated mushroom were not distracted from their target.

Quickly realizing he wasn't going to scare them off, Trajan lunged and hacked one with his sword. It nearly scuttled out of the way, but not quite. Instead of hitting it squarely the enchanted blade caught the edge of the shell, deftly removing the 5 legs on that side. The crab hissed in agony.

Unexpectedly the other crabs all sprang at him, two slamming into his chest and abdomen. They were heavier than they looked and knocked him back several feet although he didn't quite fall. His chain mail armor kept them from tearing his flesh. The crabs quickly surrounded the soldier and sharp claws worried at his legs and thighs. Two hung off his cloak, snipping at his armor.

Their weight hampered him so he spun in a circle, waving his sword low but not at any particular target. The crabs on the stone floor backed off and one on his cloak lost its grip and flew off. He smashed the last one in what passed for its face with the pommel of his sword.

As it fell he looked for his companions, just in time to see three crabs drop off the ceiling onto Etjar's head and shoulders. His helm saved him from a crushed skull but he was still knocked to the floor. More crabs scuttled toward him, claws clicking in anticipation.

Marissa, back at the entrance of the room with Lesang's body, uttered words that were heard but could not be remembered. Three bolts of red energy flashed from the fingers of her right hand, lancing into three of the crabs menacing Etjar. The first was cooked by the energy, the bolt glanced off the shell of the second inflicting a good burn, and the third squealed in agony as the magical energy burned a hole through its shell.

She took a deep breath and did it again, the red bolts killing two and badly wounding a third. "*Six down, dozens to go!*" she thought.

In the respite the wizard's magic gave him, Etjar struggled to his feet. He lashed out, shattering

the shell of another crab as the others backed away from him. He saw Trajan kill several more, then turned as Marissa screamed. A crab leaped at her, striking her squarely in the stomach. She fell hard against the wall and slid down to the floor, the crab tearing at her.

Behind him Trajan emitted a scream of rage and charged across the distance to Marissa, his blade partitioning a crab with each swing. Reaching her side he lashed out with his foot, booting the crab tearing at her arms as she protected her face and belly. The crab hit the wall with a crunch and dropped messily to the floor. Pulling her to her feet he quickly assessed her wounds as non-critical and turned to the remaining crabs, which all stopped just out of sword range. "*They're not THAT stupid*," he thought.

Etjar heard a noise behind him – the mushroom thing took advantage of the distraction and ran past the crabs menacing it, taking a few pinches but escaping. Three quarters of the crabs started after him/her/it, while the remaining survivors backed up to Tessac and the orcs' bodies. Etjar scrambled over by his companions.

Trajan held Marissa upright, blood dripping from her arms. "Get Lesang," he told Etjar. We'll come back later and bury what we can of Tessac." The trio backed away from the crabs, which immediately began feasting again.

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Trajan looked at his audience, spellbound by his story.

"What did you do?" asked Jake, sorry that the tale was ending.

"We went back the next day. Tessac and the orcs were there, well their bones anyway. The crabs picked them totally clean. Along with everything else edible they carried." He sighed. "We buried Tessac's bones with Lesang, and left that ruin as too dangerous."

His somber mood cleared and he laughed. "We got enough cash from the orcs' weapons and armor to feed us for another month while we planned an expedition to another ruin, the warren below an old wizard's tower."

The tunnels so clean,
What cleans up all the debris?
The carrion crabs.

Carrion Crab

Frequency: Common
No. Appearing: 10d6
Armor Class: 5
Move: 6"
Hit Dice: 1/2 (1d4 hp)
% In Lair: Nil
Treasure Type: Nil
No. Of Attacks: 1
Damage/Attack: 1d3
Special Attacks: leap, group attack
Special Defenses: Climbing, immune to poison
Magic Resistance: Standard
Intelligence: Animal
Alignment: Neutral
Size: S (2' diameter)
Climate/Terrain: any non-Arctic
Organization: pack
Activity Cycle: nocturnal
Diet: carrion, lichens, fungus

Experience: 11 xp + 21/hp
plus an additional 2 xp each for every 5 crabs in the encounter.

Carrion crabs are one of nature's mechanisms for cleaning up corpses of all sorts. These 10 legged horrors, weighing up to 30 lbs, strongly resemble normal crabs but are land animals.

Their shell is about 2' in diameter and the color varies from a light grey to a dark grey, although in areas where the natural stone is other colors the crabs will have shell coloration that blends closer to the natural stone.

They eat anything organic, including things poisonous to most natural creatures. Such fare has no effect upon them, and they appear completely immune to all poisons. Surprisingly, they are good to eat and considered delicacies by many sentient races, although the liver is highly poisonous – creatures eating the liver must save vs. poison or die in 1d4 turns.

The crabs travel through dungeons and dark places, eating anything edible, especially carrion. Unless starving they normally will not attack living creatures, although they will ferociously defend themselves or a meal. Intelligent fungus consider the carrion crab a true bane as the crabs' reticence against attacking living beings doesn't extend to fungus. One way to determine if carrion crabs are around is that bones will be picked clean but there will be no teeth marks, nor damage to the bones.

Although they do not move quickly, carrion crabs may spring up to 20' to attack or flee, gaining +2 to hit and inflicting double damage. In addition, because of their small size up to 20 can attack a single man-sized creature at once. They gain strength in numbers, effectively gaining 1 HD of attack strength for every 5 crabs, e.g., 1-5 crabs attack normally, 6-10 attack as 1HD monsters, 11-15 attack as 2HD monsters, and 16-20 attack as 3HD monsters. In groups of six or more one quarter of the crabs will attack normally, 1/2 will gain +2 for attacking from the sides, and the remaining 1/4 gain +4 to hit for attacking from behind.

DM Note: In small numbers the carrion crabs are pests and not overly dangerous, but in large numbers they can kill higher level characters.

The crabs can climb most surfaces, including walking along ceilings if the surface isn't totally smooth. They will climb to escape attackers, and often rest on high walls and ceilings to avoid predators. Those attacking a group of crabs should look up first – the crabs on the ceiling will drop onto the attackers. This is treated as a leaping attack and if the attacker is surprised the crabs hit automatically during the surprise phase (for double damage) and in the first round.

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The Toy Box: Pre-Assembled Equipment Packs

This monthly column features new toys, magical and mundane.

by Nicole Massey

Tom looked up at Score. People cleared out of the way to make room for the apparently civilized ogre walking with the blonde haired Halfling, not realizing that the shorter one was far more dangerous.

Score rumbled, "Need stuff."

Tom nodded. Their stealthy trip into the area to scout for the army the Black Earl was assembling meant they left their property at their respective homes, and now they needed gear.

Tom rubbed the short soul patch on his chin. He said, "We need to blend in. That means typical stuff. We know too much about adventuring to get what we would buy normally."

"Don't understand."

"We need to look like novices. We need gear."

As he said that last sentence a man came out of a shop and heard it. He smiled. The man said, in a clearly Gaelic lilt, "Oh, me boy, did ye say ye needed gear?"

Tom nodded. "We were set upon by bandits and they got our mule. We need standard equipment for traveling." Tom's lie didn't raise the slightest twinge of skepticism, as he was a consummate liar when he needed to be.

The man nodded. "Ah, ye be in luck, good boy. I got what ye need right here."

Tom raised an eyebrow, and said, "Really? What you got available?"

"Well, first I have me standard traveler's pack. It be usin' me larger backpack on a handy frame, so you can be tying things down to it. This pack also be having external pockets and some loops and tie spots. In it I gots a normal wooden bowl and cup and a set of iron eating utensils, and also a hooded lantern, a small pouch with five flasks of lantern oil, a tinderbox, one week of iron rations, fifty feet of hemp rope, a second belt pouch, one large sack, ten small sacks, five wooden wedges, and a one quart waterskin. Tied below the pack on the frame be a standard bedroll and one of me serviceable tents to make a handy package. It be costing 55 gold, and be weighing total, 70 pounds. You gots room for 40 pounds worth o' items in the pack still, so it gots a lot of room."

Tom looked up at Score. This was perfect. But he wanted to know what else the man had, so he said, "What else have you got?"

The man said, "Well I be having also packs for spelunkers, woodsmen, and winter and desert travel, and there be a special version of me standard adventurer's pack, too, for the hoity toity folk who be wanting something a bit more fancy. And I also gots special packs for spell casters. And if ye friend be short on money we have a basic bag of items, put in a large leather sack, that be covering the bare minimum."

Tom looked at Score again, then turned to the man. "Sounds good. How about you bring what you've got outside? I don't think my friend can fit through your door."

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Assembling a pack for players to cover the basics isn't hard to do, but the new *Netbook of Items and Services* can get a bit daunting – after all there's over 1,600 entries in it, almost none of them magical. The options are potentially overwhelming, so paring it down to a reasonable level helps greatly.

Following are a few "preset" pack options for use in the game that incorporate most of the normal items adventurers buy into one handy package. Some standard items, like ten foot poles, grappling hooks, and medicinal herbs are not included, as you don't need half a dozen ten foot poles in the standard party.

Standard Adventurer's Pack:

large backpack containing: Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp; Lantern, Hooded; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Oil, per

flask, Lamp (5); Rations, Iron, 1 week; Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Wedges, Wooden (5); Bedroll; Tent, Adequate: Small.

Cost 55 GP, Encumbrance 297 gpw, Room Left 303 gpw

Basic Minimal Adventurer's Bag:

large sack containing: Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp; Rations, Iron, 1 week; Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Small (5); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Wedges, Wooden (4); Torch, Normal (4); Blanket, cloth. Note: Sack is full, so additional items must be secured elsewhere or some of the contents must be removed.

Cost 9 GP, Encumbrance 400 gpw, Room Left 0 gpw

Deluxe Adventurer's Pack:

large backpack containing : Plate, Pewter; Bowl, Pewter; Mug, Pewter; Cutlery, Silver; Rope, 50' silk; Lantern, Bullseye; Pouch, Belt, Small (3); Oil, per flask, Lamp (5); Rations, Iron, 1 week; Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (25); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Wedges, Wooden (5); Bedroll; Tent, Superior, Small.

Cost 255 GP, Encumbrance 416 gpw, Room Left 184 gpw

Spellcaster's Basic Pack:

leather backpack containing: Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Lantern, Hooded; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Pouch, Belt, Large; Oil, per flask, Lamp (5); Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Bedroll; Dagger (3); Vest, Cloth.

Cost 61 GP, Encumbrance 367 gpw; Room left 43 gpw

Spelunker's Pack:

large backpack containing : Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp (2); Lantern, Hooded; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Oil, per flask, Lamp (10); Rations, Iron, 1 week; Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Waterskin, (2 pints) full (2); Spike, Iron, Large (10); Bedroll; Piton (10); Crampons, Grappling hook; Hammer (tool).

Cost 34 GP, Encumbrance 537 gpw, Room Left 63 gpw

Woodsman's Pack:

large backpack containing: Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp; Lantern, Hooded; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Oil, per flask, Lamp (5); Rations, Iron, 1 week ; Tinder Box

Different Packs for Demi-Humans

Demi-humans with infravision probably won't want the lantern in these, so it might be of worth to exclude that item and reduce both cost and encumbrance by the appropriate amount for them. That gives us the following equipment packs as examples:

Elven Standard Pack:

large backpack containing: Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Rations, Dry, 1 week ; Bread, journey (7); Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Wedges, Wooden (5); Bedroll; Tent, Adequate: Small

Cost 46 GP, Encumbrance 1,022 gpw, Room left 288 gpw

Elven Deluxe Pack:

large frame backpack containing: Plate, Pewter (2); Bowl, Pewter (2); Mug, Pewter (2); Cutlery, Silver (2); Rope, 50' silk ; Pouch, Belt, Small (3); Rations, Dry, 1 week ; Bread, journey (7); Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (25); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Wedges, Wooden (5); Bedroll; Tent, Superior, Small.

Cost 242 GP, Encumbrance 1,111 gpw, Room left 71 gpw

with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Fishhook (20); Blanket, cloth ; Tent, Adequate: Small ; Hammock; Axe, Woodsman's

Cost 57 GP, Encumbrance: 377 gpw, Room left 223gpw

Winter Pack:

large backpack containing: Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp; Lantern, Hooded; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Oil, per flask, Lamp (5); Rations, Iron, 1 week ; Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Waterskin, (2 pints) full; Wedges, Wooden (5); Bedroll; Blanket, Winter ; Axe, Ice; Cloak, wool; Crampons; Tent, Adequate: Small

Cost 61 GP, Encumbrance 382 gpw, Room left: 218 gpw

Desert Pack:

large backpack containing: Bowl, Wooden; Cup, Wooden; Cutlery, Iron; Rope, 50' hemp; Lantern, Hooded; Pouch, Belt, Small (2); Oil, per flask, Lamp (5); Rations, Iron, 1 week ; Tinder Box with flint & steel; Sack, Large; Sack, Small (10); Waterskin, (4 pints) full (2); Robe, Common; Blanket, cloth ; Tent, Adequate: Small

Cost 55 GP, Encumbrance 377 gpw Room left : 223 gpw

General Pack Creation Method

The method for this is to assemble a collection of things needed by the character and then calculate gold piece encumbrance and cost, rounding cost up to the next full gold piece value. Possible suggestions for others are a basic collection of horseman's gear, a standard mule loading package, and standard gear required for infantry units. For military uses round down instead of up, and you may want to discount the pack a bit to reflect bulk purchasing and patriotism at work. (You also might want to lower the quality of some items as well)

This process reduces the amount of time required for character generation, as an adventurer can just grab and go and have most things they'll need covered for the upcoming adventure.

Scroll Case of Protection

by Bryan Fazekas

These scroll cases, typically made of steel, are typically etched with ancient runes of protection. Each scroll case is heavier than expected, and will typically hold 2 or 3 scrolls of up to 7 spells each.

The value of each scroll case is that it offers protection against damage to the scrolls inside vs. all forms of damage, including the worst -- fire. In cases where the scroll case is subject to damage it saves as steel at +2. Should the scroll case fail its saving throw each scroll inside receives it's own saving throw at +2.

Scroll cases that offer more potent protection, as much as +5, are rumored to exist but have not been reliably identified.

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Spell Caster's Paradise

This monthly column features new spells.

Anonymity

Author: Andrew Hamilton

Level: Illusionist 1
(Illusion/Phantasm, Enchantment/Charm)
Components: V, S, M
Range: self
Casting Time: 1 segments
Duration: 1 turn per level
Saving Throw: negates
Area of Effect: caster

This illusionist spell works to blur the memories of those that the caster interacts with, making it impossible for to accurately describe the illusionist. During the face to face interactions, the targets of the spell (anyone with whom the illusionist interacts) will not notice anything unusual. Afterwards however, the targets, if they fail a saving throw vs. spells, will find it impossible to remember any details or be able to describe the illusionist. In game terms, this would play out like "I think he was a human, or maybe an elf. Maybe he was actually a she. With brown hair, no blonde, no, maybe red… I really don't remember." On a successful saving throw, the target's memory is intact, although they do not notice any spell effects. The illusionist cannot tell whether or not the target has made their saving throw.

This allows to illusionist to conduct business while hiding their identity. The anonymity spell does not prevent targets from understanding the actions that the illusionist is undertaking. Thus, they would recognize a threat or crime, and react accordingly.

The material component is a bit of wool.

Note: A 2nd level version of this spell exists for magic-users and witches, as well as for clerics who worships gods of deceit or thievery.

Cryptic Text

Author: Andrew Hamilton

Level: Illusionist 1 (Magic-User 2)
(Illusion/Phantasm)
Components: V, S, M
Range: 0"
Casting Time: 1 segments
Duration: permanent
Saving Throw: n/a
Area of Effect: see below

This illusionist spell allows a caster to write in what appears to be complete gibberish, preventing important information like command words, trap deactivation instructions, secret door instructions, etc. from falling into the wrong hands. About one line of text (12 words) per caster level can be affected by the cryptic text spell. The spell is cast (1 segment), and then the illusionist is able to write at a normal pace until they have written the total amount of cryptic text allowable by the spell, or set down their writing instrument.

The caster is able to understand his own writing, but no one else can. Even a comprehend languages spell or the thieves' read languages skill is ineffective in deciphering cryptic text. However, casting a cryptic text spell will allow cryptic text to be read. A successful dispel magic will undo the effects of the cryptic text spell, effectively erasing the cryptic text.

The material component of the spell is quill, ink and paper (or similar writing materials).

Feat of Strength

Author: Andrew Hamilton

Level: Magic-User 1
(Alteration)
Components: V, S, M
Range: 3"
Casting Time: 1 segment

Duration: 1 rd + 1 rd/3 levels
Saving Throw: none
Area of Effect: one person

This spell provides a temporary increase to a single individual's physical strength, allowing them to accomplish a feat of strength. The increase in strength is equal to 1d4 points +1/3 caster levels (rounded down). Thus a 1st level magic-user will be able to increase their own or an ally's Strength by d4 points for 1 round only. A 6th level magic-user will be able to increase their own or an ally's strength by d4+2 points for a 3 round period.

While this spell is initially weaker than the 2nd level spell Strength, with a significantly shortened duration, there are several important differences:

- the Strength gain is not based on the class of the recipient
- each "band" of exceptional Strength is treated as 1 point (thus a recipient with a 17 strength receiving a 3 point Strength gain is treated having 18/51 Strength for the duration of this spell)
- the spell will allow Strength to exceed 18/00 (thus a Feat of Strength spell cast by a high level magic-user could conceivably provide a recipient with the Strength of a titan for a short period of time

The material component of this spell is tuft of fur or hair from a strong animal or monster (e.g. bull, bear, giant) wrapped in iron wire.

Homing Beacon

Author: Andrew Hamilton

Level: Magic-User 1
(Divination)
Components: V, S, M
Range: touch
Casting Time: 1 segments
Duration: 1 hour/level
Saving Throw: none
Area of Effect: see below

This spell was developed by a magic-user who often lost his way in the wilderness. Later, the spell gained popularity with magic-users who explored the Halls of Fate and the many dungeons connected to those ruins; this spell helping them determine which way to head for home after triggering a exit teleport.

The spell's effects are quite simple, when cast it gives the magic-user a sense of the direction to travel to get "home", as well as a sense of the distance (generally a few miles, a score of miles, hundreds of miles). This is like a compass, so if a magic-user has to deviate around terrain obstacles, he will always be able to determine where "home" is.

For the purposes of the spell, "home" is a location where the spell caster has placed a rune or mark or some type. The mark must be placed on a structure or the ground; placing it on a mobile item (like a ship, wagon, etc.) will cause the spell to fail. The need to place a mark as a focus limits the usefulness of a Homing Beacon spell scribed on a scroll, as the Homing Beacon's mark must be set at the time the scroll is scribed. Thus, a Homing Beacon scroll found in a dungeon may lead to the tower of a long dead wizard, etc.

The material component of this spell is a feather from a homing pigeon.

Mighty Blow

Author: Andrew Hamilton

Level: Magic-User 1
(Conjuration/Summoning)
Components: V, S, M
Range: Touch
Casting Time: 1 segments
Duration: one punch, see below
Saving Throw: see below
Area of Effect: one target

Researched by a magic-user who was involved in a few too many bar room brawls, the mighty blow spell allows a magic-user to deliver a single punch of incredible force. The mighty blow provides a damage bonus of +1 hp/caster level (to a maximum +12 damage) to a punch or kick. In addition (if using Appendix Q, System II in Unearthed Arcana), the blow is treated as "large, hard" object, and the caster's level is added to their strength to determine stunning

likelihood. In all cases, the target must save verse death magic or be knocked prone.

The spell is only good for a single blow, but the spell remains active for 1 round/3 levels of the caster. For example, a 1st level caster must land the mighty blow during the 1st round, or the spell dissipates. A 4th level caster could swing and miss in the 1st melee round, but would still have a chance to deliver the blow in the 2nd melee round.

There is no saving throw against the damage or the increased knock-out percentage, but there is a save against the knock-down. The material component of the spell is a few hairs from a mule's tail.

Note: this spell would be suitable as a 2nd level spell (5 segment casting time) for clerics who worship gods of battle or strength.

Morkert's Mystical Glamer

Author: Lee B Connor

Level: Magic-User 1 (Illusionist 1)
(Illusion/Phantasm)
Components: V,S,M
Range: 3"
Casting Time: 1 Round
Duration: 1 Turn
Saving Throw: neg.
Area of effect:1 creature/level of caster

This unusual spell requires the target or targets to make a saving throw when the caster blows or otherwise delivers the herbs required for this spell into the targets face. If the roll failed, the creature(s) see any statues, miniatures, and pictures acting as if they were alive. Statues will move about, people will move and talk in paintings, and objects will seem to move about on their own. These creatures and objects will seem hostile to the victim, so that they will see archers shooting arrows, sword-bearing creatures swinging at them, and spell casters launching offensive spells. All of these will damage the victim as if they were real.

Inspired by the movie, Young Sherlock Holmes.

Safer Night

Author: Rachael Strange

Level: Magic-User 1 (Druid 2, Cleric 2)
(Abjuration)
Components: V,S,M
Range: Special
Casting Time: 1 Round
Duration:12 hours
Saving Throw: None
Area of effect: 10' radius/level

When this handy spell is cast the caster creates an area that repels vermin, insects, and other creatures of less than one hit die of strength from entering the circle so protected. This effect is not limited in the number of creatures so affected -- all creatures of one hit die or lower will not enter the area. As an added effect this spell also prevents odors from penetrating the barrier of the field either way. This will cut encounter chances during nighttime rest periods in half, and encounter distances are at a +50% increase, but only if the entire group remains inside the protected area for the duration of the protection required. Note that any guards in the group will lose any odor sensing abilities through the barrier of the protected area if they use smell as part of their tools for detecting foes. The material component for this spell is a dram of citronella oil mixed with a heaping teaspoon of cayenne and poured into the oil of a lantern placed in the center of the area to be protected. The hood or shutter on the lantern need not be opened to provide this effect, and the caster or any other person may terminate the spell by extinguishing the lantern prematurely.

When cast by a druid the material component is mistletoe, and when cast by a cleric the material component in the holy symbol.

Quarterly Mini-Adventure

This column features a mini-adventure that can be dropped into any campaign setting.

The Rat Lair

by Andrew Hamilton

Texts Required: Players Handbook, Monster Manual, Fiend Folio

Monster: giant rats, jermlaine

Terrain: Rural

Party Levels: 1st

Experience:

Total: 132 xp
Monster: 132 xp
Treasure: 0 xp

Setup

The party is in a small farming village when they hear a duffer in the tavern describing the old Oldhef family that was driven out of their farmhouse by ghosts. Apparently the ghosts or spirits killed the farm cats and dogs, and were making the family quite ill. Since moving out a week ago, the Oldhefs have all started to recover.

Deciding to investigate, the adventurers ask directions and walk to the farm house, arriving just before dusk. They plan to stay the night and see if it is really haunted.

The farm is abandoned, but is in excellent repair, and more than adequate to provide shelter for the night. The Oldhefs took good care of their property before being driven out.

DM's note: This adventure is designed as a "first quest" for a small group of PCs, a chance to let some "local boys" strike out on the path to adventure. The reward is a good amount of equipment (rope, spikes, sacks, torches, etc.) that let them spend their starting money on armor and weapons rather than "stuff".

The Lair

The Oldhef family -- husband, wife, daughter (age 9), son (age 7), and son (age 5) -- lived here very recently, abandoning their home believing it to be haunted. The deaths of their pets, and the illnesses they contracted led them to believe that some type of angry spirit had moved in, and the local cleric was unable to detect any evil or magic, or dispel any possession. In truth, the house has an infestation of giant rats and their jermlaine masters. The jermlaine have moved into the house after being driven out of their tribe, which lives in small caves in the hills only a few miles away.

The house is a simple wooden cottage, single story with a loft. The floor is wooden, made of thick floorboards. The walls are made of wood, and are not hollow. The jermalaine and the rats live in a network of tunnels dug underneath the floorboards of the house. They use these tunnels to move about the house, and have a few carefully concealed exits.

Parties who are using the house for shelter will be robbed by the jermlaine and the rats, which will rummage through their provisions, and foul their water supply (leading to an illness, much like the original residents suffered). The jermlaine will target any cats or dogs (or any similar animals, such as familiars) with poisoned scraps of food (save at +2 or die). The creatures are very stealthy, but an alert guard will notice them.

Parties who are specifically investigating the "haunted house" will hear scratching, objects will fall off shelves onto the PCs, etc. Observant characters will find rat tracks and footprints that look like tiny humanoid tracks.

The rats and jermlaine have prepared a few "traps", including:

- spoiling all of the remaining food (save vs. poison at +2 or fall ill, a save is required each time food is consumed),

- rigging a cupboard in the kitchen to spill out all of the contents if the doors are opened (1d4 damage), and
- chewing away some of the floorboards from below, so that a heavy person (over 200 lbs, including gear) will fall through. This causes no damage, but the person will be in a hole thigh deep, and the giant rats can attack his legs. The trapped person can climb out in 1 round, but loses all Dexterity and shield bonuses while in the hole, and cannot attack the giant rats in return.

If the PCs begin tearing up the floor to get at the rats, the jermlaine will panic and order their rats to attack. The little pests do have some bolt holes, and they will hide down their holes (although adventurers might be able to drive them out through by flooding the rat-holes (possibly getting water from the well and the use of a bucket brigade).

Jermlaine (x 3); AC 7; MV 15"; HD 1d4 hp; Atts 1; Dmg 1d2 or 1d4; SA surprise 5 in 6; SD undetectable 75%, detect invisible 50%; MR save as 4 HD; Size S (1' tall); AL NE; XPV 14 each. Hp: 4, 2, 3.

Giant Rats (x 9); AC 5; MV 12"//6"; HD 1d4 hp; Atts 1; Dmg 1d3; SA cause disease (1 in 20); SD none; MR Standard; Size S; AL CE; XPV 10 each. Hp: 4, 2, 3, 1, 4, 3, 1, 2, 4.

The jermlaine have not collected any valuable treasure, just a variety of items. Mostly junk, the party can find 12 iron spikes, 3 coils of 50' rope, 12 sacks, 2 leather backpacks in good condition, a 10' pole of strange wood (bamboo), a tinder box with flint and steel, 24 arrows, and 30 lead sling bullets.

When the party returns to the tavern with the tale of driving out and/or killing the pests, they will be rewarded with two free rounds of drinks and a free meal.

The Black Cat

DMs looking to add a more tension to the encounter can add a large feral black cat. This big cat (tipping the scales at 20 lbs) wandered through, surprised a giant rat, and made a meal of it. Subsequently, the cat has managed to make a meal of another rat. The jermlaine and the giant rats are now extra cautious, and the jermlaine are plotting the cat's demise.

This black cat will shadow the PCs, hoping they will flush out a rat or a jermlaine. Of course, players are likely to react with paranoia when the DM describes a large black cat "watching them".

If the cat is approached, it will retreat. If attacked, it will flee and hide. However, if speak with animals is used, the cat will happily describe the giant rats and the "little people" and ask if the PCs will help the cat catch them.

Feral cat; AC 5; HD 1; MV 18"; Atk 3; Dmg d2/d2/d2; SA surprise 3 in 6; rear claws d2/d2; SD surprised 1 in 6; AL N; Int Animal; Size S; XP 26; Hp 8.

Including the cat provides a "safety valve", and the number of rats and jermlaine can increase. If the PCs find themselves outmatched the cat can burst in, leap on a rat or jermlaine, and make off with its meal, evening the odds a bit. If this option is used, the DM must mercilessly remind the players for several sessions that they were saved from a TPK by a house cat ...

Loose Ends

Unless the PCs manage to kill all of the jermlaine, the little buggers will reappear elsewhere in the vicinity. Of course, once the locals know what to look for, the jermlaine are probably going to be out-matched and their days will be numbered.

The farming family will be happy to have their house back, although they may feel silly about assuming it was haunted, and there will be some good natured joking amongst the locals.

What of these caves in the hills? There are more jermlaine there, and who knows what other dangers can be found and defeated by an intrepid band of adventurers?

Editor's note: *This issue's mini-adventure happened to be 2 pages (front and back of one sheet), same as the One Page Dungeon. This is coincidental – the mini-adventure may be of any length in future issues.*

One Page Dungeon: Bandit Hunt

This column features an adventure which covers the front and back of 1 sheet.

by Bryan Fazekas

Background

This adventure is for a 1st level party of 4 to 8 characters. There is no map, just a description of terrain and encounters, so the DM may place the adventure as fits their campaign.

The story: Bandits have plagued the area, robbing and killing travelers. The bandits attacked those they could safely rob, evaded pursuit, and avoided traps. This pattern continued until a local noble's son was waylaid and badly hurt.

The noble hired mercenaries kill the bandits who proved smarter than the bandits, luring them into attacking a poorly guarded wagon full of luxury goods. Taking the bait the dozen bandits attacked, only to discover that in addition to the six visible guards another six were hidden beneath the fake luxury goods.

After a short and brutal fight the mercenaries killed 6, captured 5, letting 1 sorely bandit to escape. The mercenaries suffered enough wounds so they could not safely pursue him. The noble was satisfied with the result, rewarded the mercenaries well, and amused himself with hanging the living thieves.

The authorities placed a bounty of 25 GP on the head of the surviving bandit. In addition, rumors abound that the surviving bandit escaped with a bag of gold coins, numbering from 50 to 5,000 depending on who told the tale.

Random Encounters

1d10		1d10	
1	3 orcs	6	treant
2	3 kobolds	7	4 carrion crabs
3	12 kobolds	8	5 farmers (0 level)
4	age 1 green dragon	9	centaur
5	merchant	10	giant snake (3 HD)

The party may encounter monsters while tracking. Roll an encounter check (1 in 6) every 6 hours. Each monster will be met once unless conditions of the initial encounter indicate a second encounter is likely. Re-roll anything that does not make sense.

3 orcs: These are travelers and will avoid antagonizing the party if they are outnumbered. They will want to join the party for a full share of treasure, and will try to get ahead of the party if rejected. Each has 12 SP.

3 kobolds: These belong to a local tribe. They will avoid the party if they can, and will be evasive in answers if they can't. If they believe the party weak and (to them) rich, they will locate the larger band of kobolds and return to attack. Each has 5 CP.

12 kobolds: This band is trying to find the bandits' lair so they can steal from it. They will attack the party if they believe they can win, but will flee if 25% of their number is wounded. Each has 7 CP.

Dragon: The dragon will be sighted at a distance of at least 200 yards and will not initially see the party. The party can successfully avoid him if they try. If he sees them he will attack, but will flee if he sustains 25% damage or more. He has no treasure.

Merchant: The 0-level merchant is driving a wagon of fresh food and wooden goods along the road. He has three men@arms. He has seen nothing and will move on quickly.

Treant: The treant has seen a human who was obviously injured an hour or two before.

Carrion Crabs: They will avoid a fight but will fight back if attacked.

Farmers: They are walking along the road and have seen nothing.

Centaur: This creature is traveling through, knows nothing, and will be snotty to the party. He wants nothing to do with them.

Snake: This constrictor is hungry and will attack the smallest PC. If hit for 25% or more of its hp it will flee.

The Hunt

The distance from town to the site of the battle is 4 hours travel. This assumes the party does not have mounts and is on foot.

The battle occurred mid-afternoon of the day before the party hears of it. They hear the story at dusk and can travel the next morning. If they try to travel at night they are 50% likely to miss the site and travel beyond it. It will take 1d4 hours to realize they missed it and back track.

At the battle site the party can easily find the blood trail of the wounded bandit. He straggled along the dirt road that meanders through grassland, scrubland, farmland, and light forest. Out of sight of the mercenaries he bound his own wounds. He is still leaving a blood trail for those who are looking but outside of initial blood loss is not bleeding to death. If the party includes anyone with tracking ability, use the rules for that class.

If the party tries to follow him in the dark they will be 75% likely to lose the trail during each hour of travel. Once lost it will take 1d4 hours to find signs of the trail.

The bandit staggered along the road for 6 hours, which in day time will take the party 4 hours to travel. He discarded his scale mail armor and his broad sword, neither of which has value.

In heavier forest the bandit turned off the road and collapsed for 6 hours, leaving a heavier blood trace. Later he ambled along old game trails. The trails fork periodically and there is a 25% chance of choosing the wrong path each hour. Once lost the party will take 1d2 hours to determine this and backtrack. Tracking in the dark is not possible -- if the party is determined to try it they will lose 1d4 hours for each hour traveled.

The bandit managed to make his way along the animal trails through mixed forest for 8 hours, which the party can traverse in 4 hours if they do not lose the trail.

The party will encounter rough terrain and find more blood. After an hour of rough terrain the party will encounter a rocky cliff. To climb party members will each make a dexterity check (roll dex or less on 3d6) to safely climb the cliff. The cliff is 30' high and falling characters may suffer some damage, depending on if they fall or slide down the cliff. For each 10' fallen roll 1d6: 1=1 hp damage, 2=2 hp damage, 3-6=0 hp damage. Use of ropes and other safety measures will reduce the chance of falling or sliding by adding 1 to 6 points (DM's discretion) to the dexterity check.

Two hundred feet from the top of the cliff is a rocky bluff with a visible cave. A trail leads to the cave, passing through some large rocks. About half way the party will pass a 10' rock and see the bandit lying on his stomach on the trail about 50' ahead of them.

The bandit is obviously dead and is surrounded by 11 carrion crabs, who are greedily consuming the body. The party will notice he still has a dagger on his belt along with a small sack that shows the outline of coins.

If the party waits for 1 hour the crabs will finish stripping the bones and depart without a fight. If the party attempts to drive the crabs off they will hiss at the party. Any PC approaching within 10' will suffer a leaping attack, and the crabs will fight back if attacked. Once 4 crabs are wounded or killed, the wounded ones will flee the fight. If the crabs are reduced in number to 4 or less the survivors will flee.

The bag contains 27 PP, 123 GP, and 45 SP.

The cave opens up into a large (40') cavern, the bandit camp. In the bedding they will find another 633 CP, 483 SP, 47 GP, and 15 **Lunch Tokens**. Trade goods line the walls, including:

- 12 boxes of cloth worth30GP each (bulk 500 gp each).
- 3 boxes of good quality weapons (10 weapons per box, DM's choice).
- 2 barrels of dried meat (25GP value each).
- other local trade goods the DM chooses.

The goods are bulky, and if returned to town the original owners will offer 25% of the value as reward.

Featured Fiction: Gathering at the Smoky Tavern

Each quarterly issue will feature a short fantasy themed fiction.

Benjamin Lomax

The tavern recently renamed the Dragon's Claw Tavern was smoky, a fetid haze that hung from the rafters as low as the mantle of the dimly burning fireplace. Some indeterminate meat was cooking on a spit which the barmaid turned at irregular intervals. She was a plump wench, with greasy curls and makeup caked on in the effort to recapture some of what may have been the beauty of youth. But with the smoke and grease from cooking, it did little more than accentuate her age. Nonetheless her clientele typically overpaid for just about everything even when her service was quite poor so she had no intention of abandoning her career. They were a strange bunch, the groups that came here lately, and she turned her attention to the bizarre conversation of just such a gathering at a corner booth, a conversation that she once would have been dumbstruck by but which now had become almost commonplace. When they came in she looked over at the bar owner, who gave her a smile and a nod, confirming what she already knew. She switched over her price list to the non-local list, beer was ale, vinegar was cheap wine, cheap wine was fine wine, and all prices were quadrupled.

The dominant character was a massive brute, hairy and sporting some drastic facial deformities. The fellow wore ill-fitting bands of mail and a battered shield, both of which appeared to be made of some pitted alloy of steel and surely wouldn't survive any real fighting. Indeed, the fellow did not appear to have any suitability with the gear other than its massive brawny shoulders. Sitting immediately next to this monster was the absolute reverse, a tiny female who had placed its mini-pack on top of the chair so that she could see over the table top. She had a cheerful smile and seemed to be dressed for a walk in the fields, expressing none of the normal fear one might when exposed to the great savage sitting next to it, even when it exposed it's pointed fangs when it tore a piece of meat from the greasy hunk in front of it.

The other two were nearly as diametrically opposed, to each other and to the pair they sat across from. One was a fey elf of indeterminate sex, lovely complexion, with violet eyes and brilliant silver hair. Such an exotic creature had not been seen for an age prior to very recently, when near copies of it had seemingly emerged from the woodwork, nearly always accompanied by motley groups such as this. Next to the elf was a swarthy bearded dwarf, dark of complexion, hair, and eyes, wearing a massive suit of splinted mail armor which was polished to a silvery sheen, as was the broad-shouldered fellow's shield and the head of the mallet at his belt. Of an equal polish shone the small silver hammer hanging from a thick chain around his neck, marking him a priest of the dwarf-god Moradin. Though dwarves and elves in the region were actively hostile to each other and their tribes were unwilling to speak at the table of peace, these two seemed cozy as cousins.

This would seem to be a very strange gathering, but in the last months similar gatherings had taken place in this very tavern almost daily. They never seemed to run into each other, and none of them seemed to have encountered the other member of their dinner parties prior to meeting here and yet in every case, they bought food and drink, paid for rooms, and then departed in the morning. Most were never seen again, disappeared into the same indistinct home villages they had come from or more likely killed in the monster-ridden wilderness not far from the walls of this fortified settlement. If it weren't for the occasional bounty returned by those that did come back, she might not believe they ever existed at all.

Though their conversation bore striking resemblance to the others she heard so often lately, she could not help but turn her head at every strange remark. She bypassed another

paying customer as she was distracted, this time by the first entry into the conversation by the brutish warrior. His voice was harsh and grating, the trade tongue emerging awkwardly but with surprising vocabulary. He seemed to be introducing himself.

"Adotiln is my name." the creature said unconvincingly, with the number of syllables in that name seemingly indeterminate, perhaps three or perhaps four, and the last part of the name was like nothing she had heard from any tribe or local language. It continued "My father was an orcish savage who was part of a raiding party who attacked my nearby village. He raped my mother and would have murdered her if she hadn't escaped while he was drunk." The barmaid sat agape, as were the patrons at the nearby bar. These were the first words the beast had spoken, such intimate details spoken so casually? And the barmaid was certain that no village near here had suffered an orcish raid for a hundred years, as the orc tribes had been wiped out by the Great War versus their people in 2317. The goblinoid races had quickly moved in to take their places, and were arguably less problematic, but orc raids were almost unheard of. The brawny warrior continued as if reading from a script, "I heard that Bree-Yark is we surrender in the goblin language". This bizarre non-sequitur did not stop the maid's train of thought, though she wondered who had acquired this knowledge or provided it to the ugly fellow.

Perhaps the monster's mother had a willing relationship with one of the orc mercenaries that the border armies frequently employed? Then was embarrassed to admit it to her neighbors or the child so spawned? But even if the story were true, why tell such a story to your infant? Better to let him believe that his father such a man, killed in some foreign war, rather than hear of such trauma and allow for instant hatred of part of who you are? But she could not argue that the half-orc was traumatized. In fact he spoke relatively eloquently, so much so that when he requested the tiny Halfling female to pay for its food and drink, the little one did so readily. Not with fear as might be expected, but seemingly without any hesitation, just as she did the tiny portion of food she herself consumed. Then with equal lack of trepidation she paid for a private room for the beast as well! She had a cheerful smile and the barmaid did not notice that the pouch she was handing coins out of was marked with the insignia of the wine seller whose booth was set up during the day in the market square.

The barmaid was so transfixed by this bizarre generosity that she nearly missed the beginning of the conversation between the other two. "Marven Diamondeath here" the shiny dwarf priest uttered with conviction, speaking the trade tongue as eloquently as any human the barmaid had encountered. "I was sent out by the High Priest of my order and have travelled far from Rockhome on a sacred mission, to retrieve information on the Axe of the Dwarvish Lords, separated from my people for many centuries. Its existence is legend and merely speaking of it is sacrilegious and my mission has taken me many miles, fruitlessly searching." The others nodded, none taking note of the contrary nature of this statement. The barmaid winced, fearing the power of fearsome Moradin. Surely he would strike down this irreverent fellow for casually remarking about such a sacred quest? But no such retribution followed.

The exotic androgynous elf remarked quietly, voice betraying no hint of gender either, "Carella Joysword is what I am called. I have been travelling and poring through ancient volumes of lore for hundreds of your human years, and my search has taken me here. I am in need of companions to protect me in my search." The woman's eyes widened. What would an academic like that need protection from? And where would they be searching? The goblin tribes in the wild-lands did not do much reading. No ogre library was nearby to her certain knowledge. But at least there was some suggestion as to why this strange group had gathered.

The little Halfling was last to introduce herself "Ravamorel Sandtracker is my name. I am down with whatever you all want to do. I am not much of a fighter, but my dexterity is great and I have some pretty decent thief skills for a first level." This was the most astonishing piece of all. A first level what? Some kind of secret

society? What the hell was dexterity? And several of the other customers heard her exclaim that she was a pretty talented thief. Surely she would not be able to ply her trade in town once the word spread, and what would she be doing in the wilderness? Pickpocketing goblins?

Abruptly one of the merchants at a table nearby the group stood up, motioning to her that he might buy that strange group their next round of drinks. The barmaid frowned. This same merchant, Felitus by name, had approached just such a group only yesterday, and another two days prior to that. She knew the gentleman was fortunate in business, but again the generosity was surprising. The merchant's conversation at the other table regarded an elderly widow whose property the merchant was in the process of repossessing despite the very recent death of her husband, a faithful and devoted dues paying member of the local oligarchy. Felitus was not a generous man, and she knew that he was going to fork over a fat pouch of gold coins to this group, despite their quite apparent naivety and inexperience. He had done just so to both the other groups and neither had returned. Surely these foreigners just passing through were taking what he offered and heading for greener pastures?

She leaned in, having missed exactly what the merchant was paying these strangers for. Almost certainly it was the same purpose he had revealed to the previous groups without resolution and this time she was interested to see what the heretofore merciless Felitus was throwing his gold away to accomplish. He informed them in quick and decisive terms that he was looking to establish a trade route from the Keep to the settlements to the north, but that several settlements of savage humanoids in the area were sacking even small trading parties. He named their lairs the Caves of Chaos. This was the first time that she had heard such a dramatic moniker, though she had heard of the small bands of non-humans who raided in the wilderness. But she struggled to reconcile this clearing of humanoid settlements with the disparate stated goals of the individuals, though they would be difficult enough to reconcile with each other in any regard.

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After a few days, the barmaid had become rather jaded. Her regulars had dwindled down to a minimum and now she had the weird collections of disparate humans and demi-humans, even the occasional humanoid, coming in more and more frequently, sometimes back to back and two to three groups a day. All had stories that were wildly inappropriate or personal that they wanted to share with their new friends or with her, and that was not the worst of it. A very large group had spent most of the previous night engaged in a bar fight with the locals, most of whom were traders and one of whom was killed in the brawl. She was dealing with the fuming remainder of those traders who had just been informed that Felitus had paid bail for the murderer and he and his group of thugs had departed peacefully without restriction. She did not hold out much hope for Felitus in the near future. Even if he didn't go broke pouring his money into the purses of bizarre strangers, surely the local traders would stop doing business with him after this affair.

She was interrupted refilling their pitchers of beer and soothing their grumbling when she saw the tiny half-man from that strange dinner conversation. The little female was half-carrying, half-dragging a great sack of coins. This struck the doughty maid as strange, since any one of the dainty thief's companions would be much better suited to the task. But as with so many of the previous group survivors, she appeared to be the only one left. She was bloody and battered herself, sporting several crude bandages, and clearly had been through a great battle, but nonetheless she bore a huge smile. She appeared to be completely unaware that a small group of hard men clad in black leather followed her into the tavern. These men the barmaid had seen before, members of the thieves' guild proper. She had no idea what the halfling's earlier reference to being first level was, but based on the evil eye the guild was throwing in her direction, she was no member of that organization. The maid would be very surprised

if the little rogue left this room with that bag. She dragged the sack up and slung it up onto a chair, then promptly sat on it, drawing forth a handful of dull silvery coins and ordering a mug of honeyed mead. The coins were an exotic metal that the woman had never seen before. The barkeeper called them electrum, and identified them as ancient and valuable, but she couldn't see using them to buy her groceries with.

She was not there for more than an hour before yet another small group of eccentric individuals walked in through the door. A tall and handsome man with battered but well-polished mail, an elf dressed all in forest green with a broad yew bow strapped over his shoulder, and a ruddy eastern female in scarves and robes of pink and purple, accentuated with bangles and colored beads. With no introduction at all, they sat at the table with the newly wealthy hobbit who began to purchase drinks and food for the newcomers without a word. The good-looking warrior started things off. "My name is Adoven Serpenthelm." His voice expressed no emotion as he elucidated, "My father was…"

The barmaid turned her head. The fellow had no snake on his half-helm, and offered no explanation for his name. To be honest she was exhausted turning over the idiosyncrasies of these strange folks and their life stories, which they appeared to be willing to tell anyone who listened. Besides, another year of charging these rubes three or four times what the owner charged the locals for drinks and even the most basic chow and she would be able to retire, maybe even buying the tavern itself or going into business selling supplies. The trader around the corner had made an absolute killing virtually every morning selling sub-standard goods for Felitus' gold. He bought the items from a trading caravan selling wholesale every month and marked everything up tenfold and had no shortage of new customers.

For Further Reading

This monthly column offers reading suggestions for dungeon masters and players alike. This will include books, magazines, web sites, and anything else that might be of interest.

Indexes for TSR/WotC magazines:

The DragonDex
http://www.aeolia.net/dragondex/
This site lists a complete index of all 359 issues of Dragon Magazine.

Dungeon Magazine Index
http://intwischa.com/dungeon/
This site lists a filterable index of all 150 issues of Dungeon Magazine.

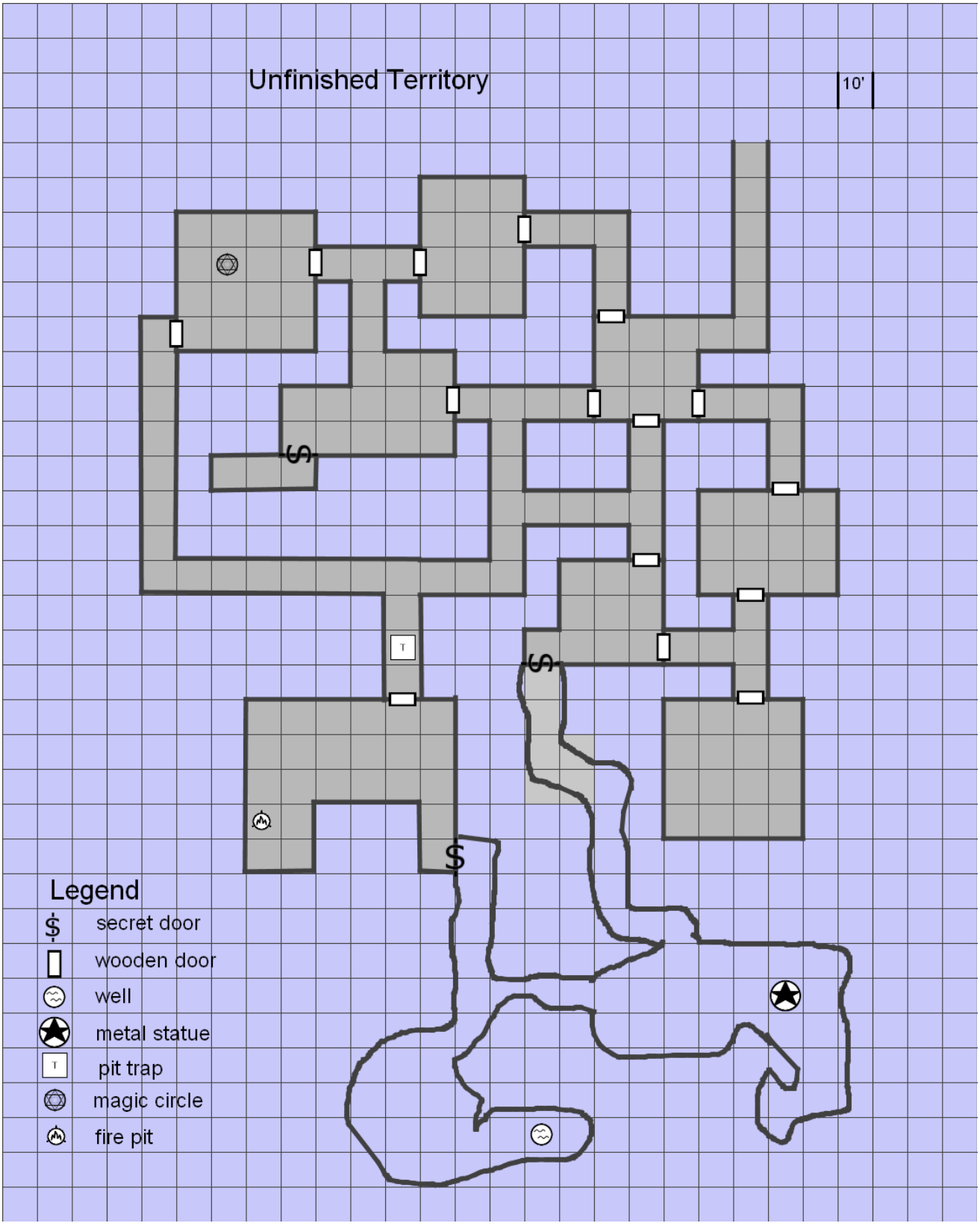
Current "Old School" Magazines:

Fight On!
http://www.fightonmagazine.com
"The magazine for those who love old school gaming"

Knockspell
http://www.swordsandwizardry.com/?page_id=10
"Knockspell is the magazine of fantasy retro-clone gaming and the original editions."

Oubliette Magazine
http://oubliettemagazine.blogspot.com
"A magazine for old school fantasy role players."

Map 2


Unfinished Territory
10'
Legend
secret door
wooden door
well
metal statue
pit trap
magic circle
fire pit

Each issue of **&** has a theme, and our goal is to ensure that at least 60% of the articles match that theme.

Why?

To give our readers as much of a good thing as we can!

Themes for upcoming issues include:

- Island Adventures
- Multi-Class Characters

What do YOU want to read?

Our readers should help decide what they want to read. Send your ideas for themes to: letters@and-mag.com

But … ideas are only half the picture! We need to fill in the other half, the articles! Do your part to keep **&** full of interesting things. Send your articles, monsters, spells, items, and anything else you can think of to: submissions@and-mag.com

Stay tuned for **&** Issue #2: Undead!

Coming in August 2012!

This issue may include:

Undead Are Done to Death

Alternatives to Level Draining

Undead Unlimited!

Undead Familiars

New column: Friend or Foe?
Adventuring class NPCs
featuring Ajari the Kenku-Lich

New column: Emporea and Domiciles
Non-Adventuring class NPCs

Creature Feature: Bone Guardian

Spell Caster's Paradise: new spells

Mini-Adventure: The Valley of Eternal Rest

The Toy Box: new items

Short fiction: Death is Personal

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Please spell check and proof articles before submitting, and please submit only articles that are completed. Drafts and outlines will be rejected. Please note that **&** will copy edit articles for content or length at staff discretion, although we make every effort to preserve the author's style. Authors will be required to sign a release giving **&** permission to publish their works.

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